

Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers

SELECTIONS FROM

met

MODERN ENGLISH TEACHER

EDITED BY

HELEN MOORWOOD



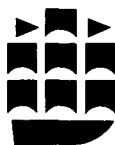
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HELEN MOORWOOD

GENERAL EDITOR DONN BYRNE



Longman

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Introduction

This selection of articles has been made from the first four volumes of *Modern English Teacher*. We hope that their publication in book form will not only make articles which appeared in the early issues accessible to new readers of the journal, but will also provide a compendium of practical ideas which all too often remain in the individual teacher's classroom. Taken together, these articles reflect the enthusiasm of their authors for their profession and their commitment to providing activities in their classes which motivate their students and raise their level of proficiency.

These articles are offered to teachers not as *prescriptions* but as *descriptions* of how other teachers have presented and used certain activities in their classrooms. Although they have all been selected because they have a value that extends beyond their original setting, it is not intended that these ideas should be used as they stand. Most of them will need to be adapted to suit the circumstances of the teacher's *own* classroom situation.

The principles and rationale behind the activities themselves are diverse and often remain implicit, but by and large they reflect a view of teaching which emphasises the importance of constant participation by the learner, harnessing the collective talents of the group, and drawing on the learners' interests; with *guidance* as a prerequisite to creativity, with *practice* going hand in hand with insight and with *variety of activity* as a strong source of extrinsic motivation. The main criteria used for this selection were that the articles should reflect this approach without being bound to any particular method, and that, most important, they should offer practical suggestions which are readily applicable by other teachers.

Modern English Teacher

Modern English Teacher is a magazine of practical ideas for use in the classroom. The articles in this selection from the first four volumes of the magazine give a good idea of its range and interests. It is published four times during the academic year, in September, November, January and March. At present, it contains 36 pages, about two thirds of which contain articles written by teachers working in a variety of teaching situations all over the world. The rest of the magazine contains ideas for practising particular language patterns, a Book Survey which examines books relating to one particular area of language teaching, and a more theoretical article which places the practice of the classroom against the context of developments in Linguistics or more specialised teaching. The back page of the magazine is devoted to Visual Aids which teachers can copy or adapt.

Perhaps the most important thing about *Modern English Teacher* is that it is a magazine written *by teachers for teachers*. It provides a forum for teachers to exchange ideas and problems with their colleagues in other parts of the world. The editor welcomes articles about practical aspects of teaching. The present editorial policy is to give each issue of the magazine a 'theme', e.g. Focus on Groupwork; Focus on Listening. This means that the majority of the articles in that particular issue will relate in some way to the overall theme, so that readers can see how different teachers tackle a particular problem. However, *any* article is considered for publication, although it may have to wait a few months until the 'right issue' turns up. Anyone with ideas for an article is invited to write to the Editor, *MET*, 33 Shaftesbury Avenue, London W1V 7DD, England.

As well as the four regular issues of the magazine, there are several Special Issues which are sold out of subscription. These focus on areas of language teaching which cannot be given enough space in the regular magazine. Titles include *English for Specific Purposes* (1977), *Visual Aids for Classroom Interaction* (1978). There are also several packages of practical material for classroom interaction devised by Donn Byrne (1978).

Those wishing to subscribe to the magazine (or buy Special Issues) should write to: *Modern English Publications Subscriptions Department*, 8 Hainton Avenue, Grimsby, South Humberside, DN32 9BB, who can also supply details of the magazine for students, *BBC Modern English*.

Oral practice – from dialogue to discussion

I.1 Sorting out your class

T. J. GERIGHTY

Even after several years' teaching experience, there is always a challenge about starting a new class.

'Your class will be the pre-intermediate group beginning on Monday at 9.30 a.m.'

The Director of Studies' tone may imply confidence in the fact that you've done similar courses before, but you know as well as he does that this one is different again. It will need a new approach.

Sorting out a new class means discovering

- People.
- People who listen to English, perhaps speak some, probably read some and maybe write some.
- People who want to learn more English – for what?

A new group of people

Every class of students has something in common. The same types turn up again and again – the quiet, the shy, the aggressive, the know-all, the clown, the couldn't-care-less, the very weak, the bright one, and so on. The picture on page 2 is a realistic one.

So-called 'experience' may make us feel numb to such types as real individuals. The 'I've met them before' attitude is dangerous. From 9.30 a.m. on Monday you've got to get through to them as people. This may mean finding out:

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| names | 'What's your name?' |
| countries or | 'Where are you from?' |
| towns | 'Where do you live?' |
| jobs | 'What's your job?' 'What do you do?' |

You've got to talk about yourself, of course; you've got to set the tone for the course. Above all, you've got to begin the important business of giving the class an identity. If you don't do it, the clown may – or the couldn't-be-bothered type; and then teaching becomes difficult. So an open and relaxed beginning (which doesn't conceal that you mean business) will certainly help to win the class as people to you.

Suppose you've just been given yet another 'Pre-Intermediate Group'...

The students have been tested and are a supposedly homogeneous group at a given level; 'pre-intermediate' here could refer to any level. You've got a fair idea of where they stand. Or have you? If the test was a purely written diagnostic affair you will have to try your students in other skills.

Here are some ways of finding out more about their English.

1. *Your favourite story*: this is probably the easiest of introductions. Your story should be simple and accessible.

Tell it or read it. You will look around for understanding or mystification before you've finished it. Then (either) – ask simple questions for the factual content, (or) get the story in chain-reaction style:

'You, A, begin; now you, B; what then, C?' and so on.

At the end of the class, during the last 5 minutes, get them to write the story down. Don't forget to collect their work; it's going to tell you a lot about their English.

2. *Pictures/flashcards*: use your usual stock of pictures or flashcards; give the class a lead to start:

Teacher: This gentleman used to drive a second-hand Mini.
Why do you think he's rich now?



The class should come to life with this picture game and the teacher should be able to size up interest areas besides noting obvious areas of linguistic weakness. Half a dozen such picture leads should be enough. Variety is more important in the early lesson(s) if the teacher is to get to know the class.

3. *Easy dialogue, just 4 lines, to complete*:

Tom:

Ted: Learning what?

Tom:

Ted: I thought you said Spanish.

This should take no time to do. Then work on it for intonation, for example; get them to work in pairs; get them to change the final word and make up different lines for Ted.

4. *Saying 'Hello', saying 'Goodbye', saying 'Yes' or 'No'*.
Give the class different situations:

Meeting someone for the first time

Meeting an old friend

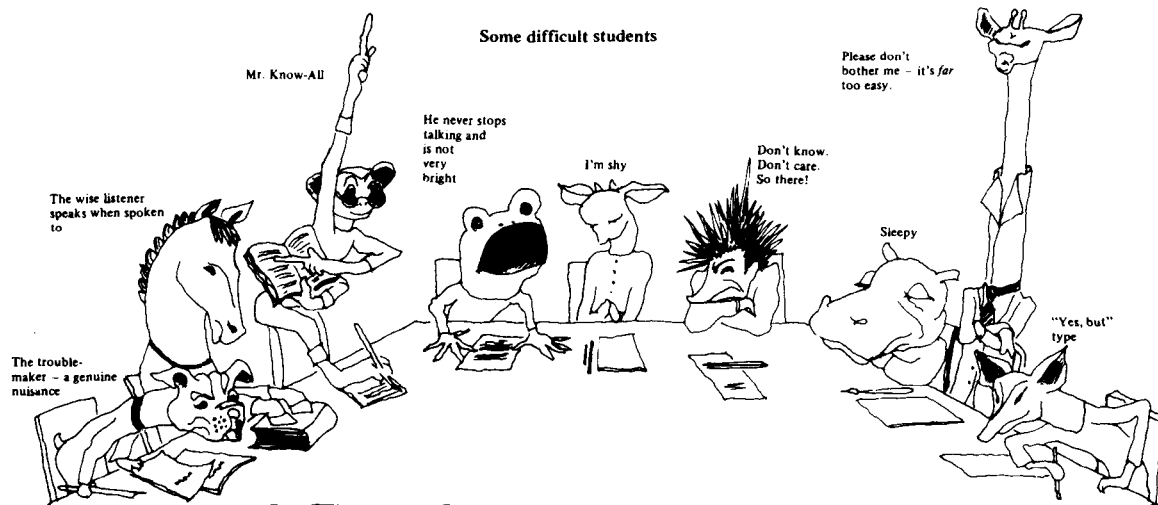
Meeting someone who comes to your house

Introducing yourself

Introducing someone else

Saying 'Hello' on the telephone

Several situations are possible. In and through them, the teacher can pick out the quick, the slow, the strong, the weak, the spontaneous.



5. Getting down to work: the text.

No first lesson should go by without a close 'look' at a text from the coursebook or anchor materials for the course.

Do something from the first unit; it may be too easy - it doesn't matter. The class must meet the book just as they must meet their teacher and fellow students; they've got to know something of the book's methods. They've got to know the course is under way.

First lessons are usually happy affairs and rightly so; the fun element in learning is important. But the teacher should leave the first lessons with a clearer idea of his students as people and as people who want to learn English.

If the business of 'sorting out your class' has begun well, class and teacher start the course with a clear idea of where they are going and of what is expected of them.

1.2 Their first lesson - how to learn

PAUL KUSEL

In language teaching forums a lot of attention is devoted to teaching and very little is devoted to learning. Of course it is essential to develop appropriate teaching techniques and to develop and use good material but these constitute only half the ingredients for success. We now have to consider a question that has largely been ignored: how can we encourage language learners to profit maximally from the teaching they are getting? The problem is important. For example, I have sometimes felt that my own teaching efforts have been frustrated by my students' use of inappropriate learning techniques.

The study of learning strategies is a large and complex field. Here I merely wish to make a few observations which are relevant to what follows. To start with, I believe that in complex learning situations, such as in language learning, people develop individual strategies. That is, each person develops his own learning techniques, which are likely to differ from his neighbour's. Moreover learners are capable of adjusting or adapting these techniques at will, if encouraged

to do so. Now, I believe that the student can discover a unique set of learning strategies that will give him optimum results. Ideally, both *student* and *teacher* should adapt their techniques until they reach the mutual optimum. In practice, one teacher is confronted with many students in a class and so his techniques must be more compromising and more stable. Thus it is incumbent on *the student* to consider and try out alternative approaches to his task until the most suitable is found. At this school¹ we run short intensive courses in which we teach the oral skills of English using a Structural-situational approach. As the courses are short it is important for the students to make these adjustments in learning technique swiftly, at the beginning of their course. For beginners and lower intermediate students, the problem is clearly that discussion in English of technique and attitude is out of the question. The alternative that is usually considered is to give the student some reading matter written in his own language. My experience has been that this makes little impression. I therefore decided to devise a practical demonstration of suitable and unsuitable learning techniques and to stage this demonstration in front of the students. The idea was that the demonstration would make them examine and perhaps change their own learning techniques. What follows is a description in the form that I have devised. I realise that this form is most suited to the types of oral English course mentioned above, and might need to be adapted if other teaching approaches are being used.

The Demonstration

What happens in our demonstration is this. Two teachers spend ten to fifteen minutes of the students' first lesson acting out an English lesson. One takes the role of teacher and uses a picture and a short simple accompanying text (four sentences). Any simple audio-visual material is suitable really. The second teacher pretends to be a pupil and sits somewhere in the class where everyone can see him. The only announcement they make is that the students are going to see

¹ King's School, London.

a short English lesson, that they are going to see it twice, and that they should watch carefully. The teacher then gives the 'pupil' a five-minute oral lesson in which listening, repetition, explanation and questioning activities are all included. During this demonstration lesson the 'pupil' shows obvious signs of an ineffective approach. He is clearly motivated to learn but his techniques and attitudes are all wrong. Here is a list of some of the mistakes he makes (they can be written into the notebook the 'pupil' is using, thus reminding him how to act):

- (a) he is tense and nervous
- (b) he is obviously trying all the time to find mother-tongue equivalents to every utterance
- (c) he interjects his mother-tongue
- (d) he constantly refers to his bilingual dictionary
- (e) he tries to understand *every* word spoken by the teacher instead of trying to get the general meaning of what is said
- (f) sometimes he listens carelessly
- (g) he is not critical of his own performance
- (h) he tries to write in his notebook when he should be listening or speaking
- (i) he tries to find the written text and complains that he can't understand if he can't see it written down
- (j) he starts speaking before the teacher finishes instead of responding afterwards, thus missing important elements at the end of the teacher's utterance
- (k) he responds using incomplete sentences, often merely completing a sentence that a teacher has started in order to prompt him

This list can of course be extended.

The demonstration lesson is then repeated exactly, except that the 'pupil' is now 'good'. He is relaxed but interested. He makes none of the faults listed above. He is clearly trying to think in English, form concepts of new words or structures by induction, and repeats the teacher's model utterances frequently in order to establish the correct sound patterns.

This double demonstration usually speaks for itself. It is advisable, however, to check that the students have understood what they saw, in case some were totally perplexed. If this is the case then the demonstrations should be repeated, making the points even more obvious.

We present these demonstrations at the start of new courses. We have found they help in developing good student attitudes and techniques in class. The demonstrations seem to impress the students, besides which they usually find it amusing to watch a teacher acting a student's role. The total time taken is 10–15 minutes, which is much shorter than the time needed to discuss in English all the points involved.

1.3 Natural dialogues

MICHAEL LONG

While clearly having a variety of uses and styles, dialogues must surely be good models of spoken English to justify being given that name. Yet in all too many textbooks,

cardboard characters with names reminiscent of cigarette advertising struggle through as apologies for conversations.

The following is typical.

John Trent: Hello. My name's John Trent.

Mary Shaw: Hello, John. My name's Mary Shaw.

John Trent: I'm a student. Are you a student?

Mary Shaw: Yes, I am.

John Trent: I'm English. Are you English?

Mary Shaw: Yes, I am.

John Trent: This is Peter Harris. He's my friend.

Mary Shaw: Is he a student?

John Trent: Yes, he is.

Mary Shaw: This is Jane Brown. She's . . . (etc.)

The textbook writer, of course, at this stage in his book wishes to introduce to his readers the continuing situation and characters who, for many lessons to come, are to delight us with similar snatches of dazzling repartee. However, this consideration and the fact that his students and, therefore, his characters, are not yet blessed with a great variety of deep or surface structures, is no excuse for afflicting both with mental paralysis.

Printed dialogues of this sort just won't do. A conscientious teacher can only use them for rather dull additional reading practice. He is free of the textbook writer's constraints, and should be able to produce better material for the classroom himself. Let us consider the qualities such material might have.

At the beginning and elementary levels the classroom dialogue needs to be short if it is to be a basis for oral work. This means probably not more than six lines, or three exchanges between two characters.

As Peter Strevens reminds us, 'laughter lubricates learning!' It will obviously help the students if both the characters and what they say are memorable. Cardboard stereotypes are not, so why not have slightly unusual, 'marked' characters, with clearly defined attitudes to each other or what they happen to be talking about? This will make it easier to use the dialogues for the situational teaching of intonation, and will almost inevitably introduce that highly desirable element of humour.

Dialogue 1

Prisoner: Excuse me . . .

Warder: Yes. What is it?

Prisoner: Is this your key?

Warder: What? Oh! Yes, it is. Thank you.

We clearly need examples of the teaching point our students are practising, but experience suggests that one or two good ones are worth a dozen of the inevitably rather contrived sort found in a 'loaded' passage. Students are likely to switch off when confronted with yet another thinly disguised structure drill, whereas they relish an opportunity to use the language in a natural way. This, after all, is presumably their aim. Why not include too, then, some of the everyday phrases and idiomatic expressions, 'the grunts and groans' of the language that will make their English sound like the real

thing? At the same level as our textbook writer's offering we might produce something like this:

Dialogue 2

Policeman: Excuse me, sir.

Man: Who? Me?

Policeman: Yes. Is this your car?

Man: Yes, it is. Why?

Policeman: My bicycle's under it.

The model can be presented with two voices on tape, or live, but the teacher playing both parts. At first, he may choose to preface the material with a few introductory remarks as to who is talking, when and where, or with a quick blackboard sketch to show nationality, age, sex, social class, occupation – whatever is relevant. For example, an unsmiling mouth and toothbrush moustache under a bowler hat would suffice to show all of this for the second speaker in Dialogue 2, and the policeman is easy.

Later, letting the students listen to the dialogue first, and then asking questions to elicit their opinions as to the identity of the speakers, is both fun and an opportunity for practice of some old patterns and vocabulary.

When the students have been familiarised with the model dialogue, they can then be asked to produce their own. How closely they stick to the original will obviously depend on their age, level and imagination, but if it is practice in the structures that they need, then the teacher will ask them to make their changes in the vocabulary slots. He will probably need to give them an example the first time they are asked to do this. They can, of course, be encouraged to add other things they know. With Dialogue 3, changes of this type might produce a student dialogue like Dialogue 4.

Dialogue 3

A: Hey! I say . . .

B: Who? Me?

A: Yes. Look at that girl! Is she English?

B: Yes, she is. She's my wife!

A: Sorry.

B: Mmm.

Dialogue 4

A: Hey! I say . . .

B: Look at that picture! Is it London?

A: No, it isn't. It's Paris!

B: Sorry. Are you French?

A: Yes, I am.

B: Mmm.

Notice that from small beginnings a longer dialogue has been built up by the addition of previously learnt material. The dialogue has served as a bridge between more controlled earlier practice and almost free conversation.

I have already suggested that dialogues such as these be presented orally, either by the teacher or with the aid of a tape. It seems easier for students to produce new exchanges of spoken English if they have already received the model in that medium. Writing the dialogue on the blackboard is another alternative, but apart from removing the spon-

taneity of a conversation, it seems to encourage dependence on the written word, something the student won't have in a real life situation. It may also lead to the students reading aloud. We need to train them to be able to rely on their ears. During presentation, their eyes and visual imaginations will be far better stimulated by the teacher's use of gesture, mime and blackboard drawings than by written words.

For later practice, however, the teacher may prefer to write the dialogue, so that by underlining or erasing he can show the students which parts he wishes them to change when making up their own. When practising the Present Perfect tense he might write up this model:

Dialogue 5

Enid Sprockett: Hey, Joyce, have you heard?

Joyce Williams: No. What?

Enid Sprockett: You know old Flossie Haddock –

Joyce Williams: Yes.

Enid Sprockett: – well, she's just got married again!

Joyce Williams: Go on!

Enid Sprockett: No, it's true.

Joyce Williams: Well, I never. That's her fifth, isn't it?

This section of the lesson is often best done by the students working simultaneously in pairs, thus achieving a far greater amount of practice. The danger of the students practising mistakes inherent in any type of partially supervised small group activity can be offset by the teacher circulating from pair to pair, and by the introduction of this work late in the practice cycle. The nature of the substitution being made is unlikely to lead to practice of structural errors. One pair of students working with Dialogue 5 might produce the following:

Dialogue 6

Alfred: Hey, Ron. Have you read this?

Ronald: No. What?

Alfred: You know old 'Fingers' –

Ronald: Yes.

Alfred: – well, he's just robbed another bank!

Ronald: Go on!

Alfred: No, it's true.

Ronald: Well, I never. That's his fourth this month, isn't it?

Once the new dialogues have been produced the teacher of a large class will be faced with a problem. He will want to give his students the opportunity to practise this successfully produced language in front of their classmates. But for each pair to do this in front of a class of, say, forty students will take at least half an hour and his lesson will long be over. One suggestion is to have pairs circulating in the classroom 'exchanging' little performances of their own dialogues. Another is to divide your class into four groups of ten, rearranging the seating if possible, and let each pair entertain the other four in its group. This way, the whole operation can be completed in five minutes.

Most published materials are going to suffer from a lack of individualisation. Like the examples quoted in this article, they will not cater specifically for your students' age and

interests, to say nothing of their particular language needs at any given moment. This is especially unfortunate in the case of printed dialogues as, when practising them, your students are theoretically producing spontaneous spoken language. Whereas the textbook will tend to be a graveyard in this area, you can embody in your own dialogues situations appropriate to your students, and will inevitably involve them emotionally as a result. Words to express their feelings – Ouch! Damn! My Goodness! Go on! etc. – need to be fed to them, and not just the language they would require to give a written report of the same event.

Lastly, it is worth remembering that it has been estimated that only thirty-five per cent of meaning in conversation is conveyed by words. Every opportunity to move around and ‘act’ the dialogues will help the students. The provision of the simplest props, especially hats, can turn the bleakest dialogue into something amusing and memorable for them. If they remember the situation they will be more likely to remember the language that went with it.

1.4 The Substitution Dialogue

GEOFFREY BROUGHTON

We are all familiar with the substitution table and the dialogue as language teaching devices, but the substitution dialogue, which combines the two, is a development which is not so widely used. And even among teachers who find it a useful aid, it is usually restricted to the first two of the three following types.

Let us look at a simple example. At the point where we want to practise ‘some’ and ‘any’, using the dialogue form as a situational context, we may produce the following:

- A: Are there any sweaters in this shop? I don’t see any here.
 B: Yes, there are some nice green sweaters over there.
 A: Will you show me some blue ones, please. I can’t see any.
 B: Sorry, but I’m not an assistant. I’m looking for some socks.

By substituting the names of other clothes for ‘sweaters/socks’ and other colour adjectives for ‘green/blue’, we can greatly increase the practice value of the original dialogue. This would be lexical substitution, affording practice in the patterning of ‘some’ and ‘any’; interest is maintained by the lexical changes, without the continued repetition of ‘some’ and ‘any’ becoming boring.

In a similar way we can produce a dialogue in which the substitution is structural. In the following example, the content of the dialogue is unchanged but the alternatives reflect the fact that we can say the same thing using different structural items.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| A: Can you | show me the way direct me | to the library? |
| B: Certainly. With pleasure. | It’s | two minutes on foot (in that direction). a two-minute walk. |

| |
|--|
| A: Thank you very much. That’s very kind. |
|--|

| | | |
|--------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| B: But | it’s closed it doesn’t open | today, I’m afraid. |
|--------|--------------------------------|--------------------|

Structural substitution of this kind is good for developing and practising flexibility in the use of the language, and though it is possible at all levels of teaching, clearly it is more useful at intermediate and advanced levels.

The third type of substitution dialogue concerns changes in style or register. In this case, while the essential facts of the message remain unchanged, the language is altered in order to be appropriate to different situations and relationships. Here, for example, is a substitution dialogue with formal/informal contrasts: a telephone conversation between someone enquiring about hiring cars and the car hire company.

- A: I understand you have cars for hire and I would like to make enquiries about them.
 (Somebody said you’ve got cars you hire and I want to ask about them.)
 B: Certainly. What is it you would like to know?
 (Right! What do you want to know?)
 A: Have you a leaflet showing your prices?
 (Have you got a list that shows what you have to pay?)
 B: Certainly. If you will let me have your name and address, I shall be delighted to post you full details.
 (Yes. Tell me your name and where you live and I’ll send you all the details.)

It is clear that in an example like this we can practise a formal caller speaking to a formal person in the office, or we can make them both speak informally, or contrast the two styles by making one formal and the other informal. It is not too difficult to produce dialogues of this kind, using formal, neutral and informal contrasts; polite, neutral, impolite; patient, neutral, impatient; friendly, neutral and cool, etc. But how do we operate them?

Clearly the foreign learner is not as sensitive to style and register as the native speaker, even if he understands every word, and therefore he must be told what is polite and what is impolite; what is formal and what is not. Therefore, it is advisable first to present and practise an unsubstituted dialogue – in the above example, the formal. The overhead projector is an ideal aid here, since a transparency can be prepared with the formal dialogue, then later the second informal version of the dialogue in another colour is superimposed for contrast and practice. I prefer to practise the original with students working in pairs to identify one style, then, with the overlay, to practise the contrasting style, and finally for the paired students to take turns in being formal and informal. When introducing three styles – say, polite, neutral and impolite – each colour-coded, it is best at first to have the alternatives appear in the same order throughout. For later practice, jumble the styles, and later still take away the clues that colour-coding has given. This is genuine practice in selecting appropriate language.

The most sophisticated handling of the substitution dialogue moves into controlled composition. In this case an unsubstituted dialogue is shown to a class on the overhead projector. Then they suggest alternative ways of saying the same thing. These are discussed and identified as being polite/less polite/rude, or whatever categories are being used, and the acceptable suggestions are added to the dialogue, which is subsequently used for paired practice ('You be polite, you be rude' etc.).

Finally, here is a dialogue to try out on your friends and students. Speaker A can be feeling superior, neutral or inferior, but his choice of expression is not always given in that order. Students should first identify which answers are neutral, which show aggressive superiority and which inferiority; then the dialogue should be practised without allowing A to change his feelings during the conversation.

- A: Oh, hello, is that Dr Robinson's surgery, please?
(Hello, is that Dr Robinson's?)
(Dr Robinson's?)
- B: Yes, sir, it is.
- A: Oh, good, I was afraid I wasn't going to get through. It's Mr Rogers speaking.
(About time. I thought you were never going to answer. It's Mr Rogers.)
(At last. I've been ringing for several minutes. This is Mr Rogers.)
- B: Oh, yes, Mr Rogers. I'm sorry if you were kept waiting. Can I help you?
- A: I want to make an appointment.
(I'd like to make an appointment, please.)
(Do you think I could make an appointment, please?)
- B: Yes, sir, when would you like to come?
- A: My best time is Thursday evening.
(It will have to be on Thursday evening.)
(I was wondering if Thursday evening would be convenient.)
- B: I'm afraid Dr Robinson won't be here on Thursday. Would Friday evening be any good?
- A: Well, it's a little inconvenient, but it's possible. Is 7.30 a suitable time?
(Well, if that's the best for the doctor, I can manage Friday. Could I come at 7.30?)
(Oh, very well. But make it 7.30.)
- B: Certainly.
- A: Right. I'll be there. Goodbye.
(Thank you. I'll see you on Friday. Goodbye.)
(Thank you very much. Until Friday, then. Goodbye.)

The first method usually has a disastrous effect on the rhythm and intonation, even if the teacher has practised the dialogue with the students for a long time beforehand. The second method often results in the students forgetting and stumbling over their words or one student forgetting all the important lines. With a dialogue written by the teacher, carefully incorporating structures which are being revised, the student often leaves out those same very carefully constructed lines.

The following alternative method is very simple and has proved very effective:

Go through the dialogue as usual, then hand out duplicated sheets with a skeleton version of the dialogue, giving long blank lines and just the nuclear words. (If there is no chance of duplicating sheets this skeleton version can be written up on the blackboard.)

This skeleton is enough to remind the students what the next sentence is, but they are providing all the structural elements, and the pronunciation isn't distorted by their reading it aloud.

Below, as an example, is a dialogue. Read it through once, quickly (this will put you in a similar position to the student who has been through it repeating it several times). Try to do it from memory, then turn this page upside down and see if you can reproduce it with just the prompts given. Do notice that the words given are nearly all the nuclei of the sentences, so that even if the students over-emphasise these, it does not matter, because these are exactly the words you want to have most emphasis.

Booking theatre tickets over the telephone

- A: Have you any tickets for tonight's performance?
B: Which one? The early one or the late one?
A: The late one.
B: Yes. How many do you want?
A: Just two.
B: I'm afraid we've only got two together in the last row.
A: Can you see from there?
B: Oh, yes, perfectly.
A: I'll take those then.
B: Pick them up half an hour before the performance.
A: Thank you very much. Goodbye.
B: Just a minute. Could you give me your name?
A: Smith.
B: Is that S-M-I-T-H?
A: That's right. Goodbye.

1.5 Dealing with longer dialogues

SUSAN HENDERSON

A dialogue can present difficulties when students begin to act it out. Either the teacher gets the students to read their parts, or asks them to try and repeat the dialogue from memory.

Dialogue with just the nuclear words.

A: _____ tonight's _____?
B: _____ one? _____ early _____ late _____?
A: _____ late _____ want?
B: Yes. _____ want?
A: _____ two _____ together _____ last _____
A: _____ see _____?
B: _____ yes, perfectly _____ those _____
B: _____ half _____ performance _____
A: _____ much _____ bye _____ name?
B: _____ minute _____
A: _____ right. _____ bye.

1.6 Exploiting classroom incidents

H. J. S. TAYLOR

Are your pupils bored with their English lessons? Do you scratch your head and wonder why? Your textbook seems quite adequate. You do plenty of oral work based on the passages. The pupils give you reasonably accurate responses. They read quite well. Their written work shows that they have a fair idea of English syntax (except for those horrible tenses, articles and prepositions). They do quite well in the examinations, too. Yet there is no doubt that they are not inspired by the kind of lessons you give.

It could be that you are teaching English as a 'dead' rather than a 'living' language. What is your real objective in teaching English? Are you making your pupils expert in mechanical transformations and exercises, or are you paying attention to actual social usage? Are you making English into a genuine means for each individual to express his or her personal feelings, wishes, surprise, disappointment, anger, happiness, opinion, disagreement, etc., etc.? If not, then I am afraid you are teaching a classroom examination language, and students, unless intellectually interested in academic learning, will soon become bored by the lack of relation to real life of your language teaching. But if so, then you are truly teaching English for communication. How do you do this? In several ways:

1. After formal discussion of a passage, transfer it to the pupils' own experience.

e.g. 'Which of you has done the same thing as the person(s) in the story?'

'Sir, I have.' (Present Perfect tense)

'Can you tell us about it?'

'Yes. Two years ago I tried to . . .'

(Simple Past tense)

'Good. Anybody else? Has anybody done it in a different way from the way in the story? Did it work? What was the result? What did you feel? What did your father say?' etc., etc.

2. Start the lesson in this discursive way; then the next stage will be to read about it with heightened interest and understanding.

Begin with the personal lives of the pupils and introduce new grammar, lexis and idioms where necessary or possible, prompting gently when they hesitate or falter, encouraging fluency and confidence rather than inhibiting them with too great exactness, and finally rousing their curiosity by saying: 'Now we have a writer who takes rather a different point of view. You've told me a lot about what you think; let's see whether you agree with what he says.' So, having had an interesting discussion at the pupils' level, it does not matter too much if the textbook author is a bit dull or unconvincing; you can agree with your pupils and add these two useful adjectives to their vocabulary!

3. Be quite original.

An accident happens. You drop your pencil. The point is broken. The pencil is temporarily useless.

Teacher: Oh dear, I've dropped my pencil. What's happened?

Pupil: You've dropped your pencil.

Teacher: Where is it?

Pupil: It's on the floor.

Teacher: Will someone pick it up for me?

Pupil: Yes, I will.

Teacher: Who will?

Others: Jan will.

Teacher: Oh dear, the point's broken. What's wrong with it?

Pupil: The point's broken.

Teacher: What must I do now? (No one answers; no one knows the right word.)

Teacher: I must sharpen it. Sharpen. I must sharpen it. What must I do?

Pupil: You must sharpen it.

Teacher: What must you do if you break the point of your pencil?

Pupil: I must sharpen it.

Teacher: Good. Who will sharpen it for me? Who's got a knife?

Pupil: I have. I'll sharpen it for you.

Teacher: Thank you very much. What's Peter going to do?

Others: He's going to sharpen your pencil for you.

Look at all the language this simple event has generated. And only you know that it was not an accident, but a premeditated incident designed exactly for this purpose – to make the classroom the place where language is taught that fits real human situations and serves an authentic communication need.

4. You're a good teacher: you play language-learning games with your pupils that make drills fun instead of a bore. But what about all the incidental English that accompanies the game and is really real, in addition to the language items in the game, which are only relatively real?

e.g. 'Miss, he's cheating!' (How can we teach 'cheat' better than by putting pupils in a cheating situation?)

'He didn't throw a five!' (stress on 'five')

'It's my turn!' (stress on 'my')

'Oh, Mary won, after all.' (disappointment: falling tone)

'We haven't finished yet!' (frustration: rising tone; anticipated victory: fall rise)

'One of the cards is missing!' (surprise, leading to suspicion)

'It's no use playing a game with Susan: she doesn't like losing.' (impatience)

'Never mind. She'll have to learn.' (tolerance)

How can our pupils learn to express their feelings unless we arrange situations in which they really want to do so? If your

pupils have the feelings but haven't yet got the language to express them, then you must pick out a demonstration group, play the game with them in front of the class, stop when the various incidents arise (or deliberately introduce such incidents), and provide the words needed to express feelings, subdue indignation, and get the game going again. You are thereby teaching sportsmanship as well as English!

5. Obviously, it is essential for the teacher to use English all the time and to get the pupils into the habit of asking questions and hearing all their instructions in English. Classroom organisation is a genuine situation for teaching real English and for expressing (and sometimes exploding!) real feelings.

e.g. 'Get out your books.'

'Sir, I've left mine at home.'

'Oh, you idiot! That's the . . . time you've done that. For goodness sake, don't do it again. Who'll share with him?'

Or in groupwork:

'Have you all got what you want?'

'Does anyone want some more . . . ? Hands up anyone who wants . . .'

'Can I borrow the scissors?'

'After you with the glue.'

'What have you decided to do this time?'

'What did you do last time?'

'What are you going to do next time?'

Or interests:

'What are you doing at the weekend?'

'Is anyone playing football?' etc.

'Who are you playing against?' etc.

'How did the team do in the last match?'

Or the weather (this is real enough!):

'What's the weather like? Is it hot/cold/windy/sunny/cloudy/etc?'

Or birthdays or other celebrations, anniversaries, feast-days, etc.:

'Who's had a birthday this week?'

'How old are you?'

'What presents did you get?'

Or local events:

'What's on at the cinema?'

'Did anyone see . . . on television last night?'

'Did anyone get hurt in that car crash by the police-station?'

Or outside the window:

'Look! There's a fire-engine. I wonder where the fire is. Who will find out about it and tell us all about it tomorrow?'

'What do firemen do? They put out fires. Has anyone been in a fire? What happened?'

6. Soon it should be possible to let the students take over this kind of questioning. Make it competitive. Make them ask the questions on behalf of their team or group. Encourage them

to ask further, to probe deeper. You are now giving them the techniques for maintaining a conversation. . . . 'Really? That's very interesting. What happened then?' etc., etc.

7. Finally, develop it into reading and writing. Whatever they have said, they can write. They can read in order to find out more. Incidents can develop into projects, or into articles for the English magazine. The textbook has not been discarded, but it has become subordinated to the real needs of your pupils – to bring English to life in their own lives.

1.7 Extracts from plays for discussion

PHILIP ROBERTS

The procedure described in this article is one we have used to involve classes in 'doing' and 'discussing'. The aim of the exercise is to develop the students' ability to discuss in English. With the right choice of material and adjustment of method this work can be done at all levels. However, it needs a teacher who has already got a free and sympathetic working relationship with everyone in the group. It is essential that each student is used to contributing ideas in front of the group.

Script: an adapted extract from Pinter's *A Slight Ache*.

Flora and Edward are in the garden. Edward is sitting at the table reading a paper. Flora is standing near the table. The breakfast things are on the table.

Flora: Do you know what day it is?

Edward: Saturday.

Flora: It's the longest day of the year.

Edward: Really?

Flora: Yes.

Edward: Cover the marmalade.

Flora: What?

Edward: Cover the pot. There's a wasp. (*He puts the paper down on the table.*) Don't move. Keep still. What are you doing?

Flora: Covering the pot.

Edward: Don't move. Keep still. Leave it.

(*pause*)

Give me *The Telegraph*.

Flora: Don't hit it. It'll bite.

Edward: Bite? What do you mean? Keep still.

(*pause*)

It's landing.

Flora: It's going into the pot.

Edward: Give me the lid.

Flora: It's in.

Edward: Give me the lid.

Flora: I'll do it.

Edward: Give it to me. Now . . . slowly . . .

Flora: What are you doing?

Edward: Be quiet. Slowly . . . carefully . . . on . . . the . . . pot.
Ha-ha-ha.
Very good.

(*He sits on a chair on the right of the table.*)

Flora: Now he's in the marmalade.

Edward: Precisely.

(*pause*)

(*Flora sits on a chair to the left of the table and reads the paper.*)

Flora: Can you hear him?

Edward: Hear him?

Flora: Buzzing.

Edward: Nonsense. How can you hear him? It's an earthenware lid.

Materials: Table, 2 chairs, a copy of *The Daily Telegraph*, a jam pot with lid. A copy of the script for each student.

Method: Have table, chairs, paper and pot (with lid off) set up beforehand. Distribute scripts. Organise class into 'Edwards' and 'Floras'. Throughout the exercise the centre of attention will be the actions of Edward and Flora. Without preamble select the first pair. They stand by the table.

Discuss:

'Where are the table and chairs? What's the weather like?'

Then discuss:

'Who is sitting? Who is standing? What's Edward doing? What's Flora doing?'

When these points have been agreed on, Edward and Flora begin reading . . . to:

Edward: Don't move. Keep still. What are you doing?

Flora: Covering the pot.

Discuss:

'Why does Edward tell Flora to cover the pot? What is Flora doing when she says "Covering the pot."?'

Arrange for a student to make the sound of a wasp.

Discuss:

'When does Edward see the wasp? When does Edward put the paper down?'

Repeat the reading from the beginning to rehearse the appearance of the wasp and the actions of Edward and Flora. When these points have been established to everyone's satisfaction, continue the reading to the next point in the script, which will be:

Edward: Don't move.

Keep still. Leave it.

(*pause*)

Give me *The Telegraph*.

Discuss through questions as above:

'Why does Edward say "Don't move", etc. Why does Edward ask for *The Telegraph*.'

When the first couple have worked through the script, other pairs work on it in turn, and the class function as directors.

Remarks

Working this way the students become familiar with the utterances in the script tied to body movement and external

factors. These physical realities give meaning not only to the words but also to the way they are spoken. Take, for example,

Edward: Give me the lid.

Flora: I'll do it.

Students almost invariably interpret this as Flora agreeing to give Edward the lid. Exploration of the situation neatly relates Flora's body movement to a meaningful intonation. These utterances will be used in the discussion taking place around the script, and what is being learned about the script spreads into the language of the discussion itself.

Thus the teacher must keep his attention on the language of the discussion, once the exercise gets under way. The questions used to elicit discussion on the various points must be carefully phrased with a view to controlling and phasing the discussion. This will get much more difficult to do once the first reading has been completed. Successive readings will not be mere repetitions but will generate interpretive innovations. These will be real meat for discussion, but this stage cannot be planned beforehand; the teacher will not only have to improvise his questions but will also have to select or approach the innovations in a way appropriate to the language level of the class. If this is not done with care the discussions will rapidly degenerate into aimless jabber.

Because these innovations will derive very soon from ideas about character and relationships, the teacher must work out ways of exploring these ideas with all classes. In general this can be done by asking the student to 'show' the idea rather than 'explain' it. If the idea is about character, then the student can show it through gesture, movement, tone of voice, etc. The discussion can then be about the gesture, or whatever, rather than about an abstraction.

The script

As the exercise begins without any preamble, the script should not introduce new vocabulary or structure, and any preparation in this way should be done in an earlier lesson and without reference to the script.

If this exercise is being thought of as a long-term activity, it is worth spending time designing the scripts in terms of utterance length. In principle, utterances should be short, but as work progresses their length can be varied to highlight speech rhythms, register and other aspects of speech behaviour, e.g.

He: Been here long?

She: Er . . . six months.

He: How much do you pay?

She: 15 marks a month.

He: 15 marks a month?

She: Yes.

He: With breakfast included?

She: Yes, I think so.

He: You only think so! At 15 marks a month!

She: Oh well, anyway, I just give the old girl money when I've got some.

We feel we have only touched on some of the possibilities this work offers, and we would be glad to hear from anyone who has taken it further.

1.8 How to use a text as the basis for a guided conversation lesson

L. G. ALEXANDER

Assumptions

1. The students (primary, secondary or adult) have got beyond the beginners' stage and are working audio-lingually: i.e. pictures are no longer indispensable for communication purposes.
2. Conversation has to be guided before it can become open-ended or 'free' and texts are an excellent medium through which to guide aural/oral work.

Practical considerations

1. Any text will do providing it is the right level for the class. You are in the best position to judge this (if you know your class!). You can use materials specifically designed for the job, or select your own from current publications.
2. The text must be short. How short or long depends largely on the students' level. But one thing is certain: if the text is too long or too difficult a lot of valuable talking time will be wasted communicating it.
3. The text must be engaging and lively so that it will provide a common point of reference for the varied interests, backgrounds and abilities in your class. (This is especially important when you are dealing with remedial students.)

Two prohibitions

1. DON'T explain all the difficult words and structures before presenting the text.
2. DON'T get the students to 'prepare' the text as homework.

Both these much-practised activities deprive the students of valuable listening exercise. Students have to be trained to make an effort to understand unfamiliar material at first hearing. If the difficulties are explained beforehand, this valuable practice goes by the board.

Suggested lesson plan

Assuming a lesson of about fifty minutes, time can be allocated roughly as follows:

| <i>Phases of the lesson</i> | <i>Minutes</i> |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Presentation of the text | 10-15 |
| Asking questions on the text | 10 |
| Students ask questions on the text | 5 |
| Oral reconstruction of the text | 10 |
| Transfer phase: General questions | 5 |
| Talking points | 5-10 |

Now each in turn:

Presentation

There are two basic ways of presenting a text both of which can, and should, be varied infinitely so that the students don't settle down to a too-comfortable routine. The first method is a **communication technique**; the second is a **listening-comprehension technique**.

The **communication technique** is as follows:

Introductory Remarks (books shut): Say something about the subject-matter of the text.

Listening (books shut): Read the text or play the recording.

Intensive Reading (books open): Go through the text line by line with the students to make sure they have fully understood it. Get your explanations, etc., from them: a 'corkscrew operation'.

Listening (books shut): Read the text again, slightly faster this time.

Reading aloud (books open): Get two or three students to read the text aloud.

The **listening-comprehension technique** is as follows:

Introductory Remarks and Listening Objective(s) (books shut): Give the students some background information about the text and ask them to listen out for something specific. (e.g. 'See if you can find out the real reason why Mr X went to see his doctor yesterday.')

Listening (books shut): as before.

General Comprehension Questions (books shut): Ask a few general questions to find out how much the students have understood at first hearing.

Intensive Reading (books open): as before.

Reading aloud (books open): as before.

The second technique takes a little longer but intensifies the students' listening. (They won't sit there with their eyes open and their minds shut!) Note that repetition at this level is merely time-consuming and tedious and is not included as one of the basic steps.

Asking questions on the text

Bombard the class with mixed questions on the text. (I find it is better to do this than to get students to ask each other because they fumble and slow down the pace of the lesson.) Q and A sessions must have plenty of pace and attack! (If you are no good at asking questions off the cuff, then do your homework!)

Students ask questions on the text

Example:

Teacher: Ask me if Mr X went to the doctor yesterday.

Student: Did Mr X go to the doctor yesterday?

Teacher: Where . . .

Student: Where did Mr X go yesterday? etc. rapidly round the class.

I know this is artificial, but after endless experimentation I still have not been able to think of a more effective and economical method. It rapidly teaches and/or remedies and puts an end to all the 'Where he went?' business.

Oral reconstruction

Write on the blackboard a few key words taken from the text (do this preferably before the lesson begins) and ask individual students to 're-tell the text'. If it is a good text (short, etc.) they will know it pretty well by heart by this stage. Don't insist on their being word-perfect and PLEASE DON'T interrupt them while they are at it. Point out and correct one or two mistakes they might have made AFTER they finish speaking.

Transfer exercises

This is the most important activity in language learning and is virtually universally ignored by textbooks – especially those which rely heavily on substitution drills and other heavy-handed devices. Taking our cue from the text we select a similar subject and get the students to talk about their own experiences. The exercises to this point were text based; now they become life based.

General Questions: Again quick Q and A round the class, only this time the students are talking about themselves. One question will suggest another so you will not dry up.

Talking Points: Take two or three ‘talking points’ or topics suggested by the text and get the students to discuss them. (Each student can make one or two statements.) Invite the students to ‘have a go’ at talking freely, regardless of the number of mistakes they make (or think they will make).

The scheme I have outlined is for guided conversation. After the students have had plenty of practice of this kind their fluency will increase enormously. Eventually you will be able to go straight from the text (never abandon it) into an open-ended conversation. This takes time, of course, but it is teaching and learning with a purpose: it systematically develops aural/oral skills.

1.9 Students take over a conversation class

PETER LOONEN

How do I get my students to talk? The answer may well come from the students themselves. It is remarkable how resourceful they can be when called upon. In one of our classes (where the students’ level of English is reasonably advanced) two students are invited to take over for the last fifteen minutes. They are free to do what they like but they should get as many students to talk as possible. Here are some of their suggestions:

– One student reads out a short text (about one page). The sentences, or clauses, which are written out on separate pieces of paper, are distributed among the students who are then asked to piece the story together.

– Instead of a text one can also use a strip cartoon. Distribute the cartoons (preferably without any words on them) and leave it to them to find the story and the correct order. It should not be difficult to find your cartoons: any popular magazine or newspaper will probably have one. As a valuable side effect the games will force the group to organise itself: one, or perhaps two students should act as a focus, collecting cartoons and deciding which is to come next. These discussions have always been lively and directed towards a specific goal.

– Another source of ideas was the radio. We have tried several games which can be heard on the radio. The more familiar they are the better. If the students have played them in their own language, they will know the procedure and they can concentrate more easily on the target language. We tried

‘Any Questions’ with a certain measure of success and also various guessing games, for example, an adaptation of ‘Call my Bluff’: write an unfamiliar word (bumf, marjoram, plonk) on the blackboard. One student leaves the classroom, the others think up a fancy description of the word but one of them will give the correct meaning. The student rejoins the group and tries to find the meaning of the word by asking for descriptions and explanations. This is a fairly advanced game, since so much depends on imagination and presentation, but it is worth trying.

– Ask the students to describe a familiar activity in detail: How do you do your shoes up? How do you drive a car? How do you get to the station? How do you make an omelette?

The specific vocabulary often proves to be a difficulty but it does make them aware of the register.

I have not yet managed to get the students to take over completely. So long as the teacher is there, they seem to assume that he is in charge. But I always tell them that it is *their* fifteen minutes, therefore *they* should ask the questions, organise the groups and see to it that everyone speaks English.

1.10 Music sets the mood for a discussion

JOHN LEE

Not long ago I was asked to take an advanced class at short notice. I had them for only one hour and knew nothing about them as students.

I decided to take a tape of music without words. The music I chose was a Peruvian folk song, ‘Buscando la Ruta’ (Seeking the Way). It was a very sad tune played on one of the Andean flutes and a small guitar (charango). Except for three comments in Spanish by the musicians there were no words.

I played the tape and then asked some general questions about it. Soon there was a discussion going about the life of the composer and players of the music. Although none of the students had ever been in Peru or heard the music before, they were soon coming out with opinions and comments about life on the Altiplano in Peru, Bolivia and Columbia. I chipped in occasionally with facts, and each fact or opinion caused further discussion. The hour flew; the students used their English in a realistic situation and I was able to pass on a mine of information about the students’ weak points to their regular teacher.

One of the problems we often have when listening to songs not specially written for English learning, whether records or tapes, is that the singers’ pronunciation is not always clear. It might be a useful exercise, with an advanced class, to see how much of the text can be worked out, using hindsight or anticipation. Both of these are problems in a foreign language. But whatever the number of linguistic problems, do not forget that the mood of the music itself can be of help in leading to discussion.

Let us take our favourite folk, pop or classical records and tapes into the classroom and get the students in the mood for talking.

1.11 The conversation class – its goals and form

DAVID FOLLAND and DAVID ROBERTSON

Oral skills are of great importance to the majority of language learners. This fact now seems to be generally recognised. Even so, conversation is often regarded as a minor part of a foreign language teaching programme. The reasons for this are many:

- the popularity of the language laboratory and the belief that it is sufficient for the teaching of spoken language;
- the absence of an oral examination in some schools and institutes of higher education;
- the difficulties presumed to exist in getting a class (especially a larger one) to converse in a foreign language;
- the lack of recognition of the importance of conversational (as opposed to 'oral') ability in the target language;
- and (possibly) a belief that a native speaker is necessary for a conversation lesson.

But even allowing for the problems, once the need for improving learners' conversational ability is recognised, the advantages are enormous. The increase in language laboratory facilities has improved the position of oral language teaching. But language laboratories have their own inherent limitations. No one can hold a natural, meaningful dialogue with a machine, no matter how well contrived the programme. If students are to thoroughly master oral skills they must be provided with opportunities for using their skills in situations which are stimulating and as nearly realistic as possible. The conversation lesson is one important way of providing this, and should have a place in foreign language syllabuses at all levels. The teacher needs to approach the whole problem of conversation in as serious and professional a way as all other forms of language teaching are approached. The aim of this article is to suggest how this can be done.

The goals of the conversation lesson

The conversation lesson might be said to have three goals. The first is to introduce and practise elements of spoken language. This not only includes the skill of expressing oneself orally in a foreign language, but many other aspects of spoken language too. The lesson should aim at improving the learner's comprehension of speech; if possible both everyday conversational speech, and more specialised uses of spoken language (e.g. medical, business). It should also provide an opportunity for learners to use both familiar and new vocabulary actively, and in realistic contexts. Idiomatic language is easily and naturally introduced, and students can be encouraged to use it and to learn to recognise the differences between written and spoken language.

The second goal of the conversation lesson is closely related to the first; to bring passive knowledge of the language into active use, and to develop this in language situations. Teachers often find that students gain good marks in paper and pencil tests, but have difficulties in expressing themselves in the language, particularly orally. The conversation lesson gives learners an opportunity of developing active oral skills, which might include such aspects of conversational language as 'strategies' (such as formulae for disagreeing, butting in, and so on), 'gambits' (What's your opinion . . .?, I see your point, but . . .), 'stabilisers' (I mean . . ., Well, now . . .) and even some conversational paralinguistic features of the language.

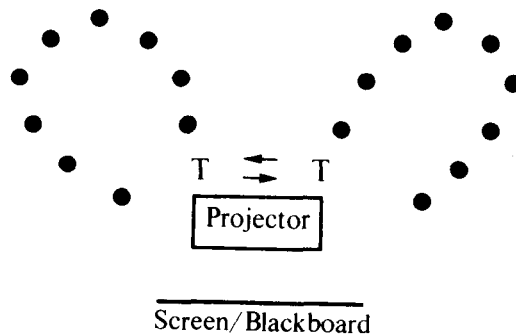
The third goal of the conversation lesson is the creation of a situation in which the other two goals may be realised. The situation should be as realistic as possible, but it will be unavoidably unrealistic to some extent, because in most teaching situations learners share a common mother tongue. But once it is pointed out that in many countries English is used as a *lingua franca*, the situation will appear more realistic.

The form of the conversation lesson

This is of the utmost importance when attempting to fulfil the goals.

Place

A suitable place should be found, as unlike a normal classroom as possible, with, ideally, comfortable chairs and round tables (but not a café, with its obvious distractions). The size of the class will influence the seating arrangements, but if the group is ten or less, a circle or semi-circle is best. The teacher should be part of the group, but should if possible be near a blackboard or overhead projector for giving necessary vocabulary. If the class is between 10 and 20, two groups can be formed, both facing the board or screen, with the teacher alternating between the groups, like this:



With more than 20, smaller groups are necessary, and the teacher must circulate from group to group.

The duration of the lesson depends on the level of student ability. Conversation need not be restricted to advanced students; as soon as basic grammar and vocabulary have been taught, students should be given the opportunity of using it orally. Conversation should be a complement to other aspects of language teaching. Fifteen minutes of conversation is not impossible for students who know very