

Using Prepared Dialogues in Primary Classes

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“Structural Syllabuses” are in use in many parts of the world as guides to the teaching of English at both primary and secondary levels. They all contain a list of structures and sentence patterns to be taught.

One danger inherent in such kinds of syllabuses is that each structure will tend to be presented and practised in isolation. For example, last week a class might have practised adjective phrases (“Where is that book *by Enid Blyton?*”). This week, they may be working on questions

with final prepositions (“*Who* did you give it *to?*”) Next week, they may be introduced to a pattern containing the to-infinitive (“I told him *to return* the book.”). As individual patterns, these may be well-taught, but do pupils ever have practice in using all three patterns together? Do they ever have the opportunity to use a variety of patterns for a piece of communication? This is, after all, what language is. We all make a selection of the patterns of the language when we wish to communi-

cate. Rarely do we find that ten examples of the same pattern are adequate for our purpose.

If your answer to the questions above is "No", then you would do well to consider using prepared dialogues as one of your teaching aids. Having taught the patterns mentioned above, for example, we could combine them in a simple dialogue like this:

Halim: Where is that book *by Enid Blyton*?
George: I don't know. *Who* did you give it to?
Halim: Faridah. I told her *to return* it yesterday.
George: (searching among some papers on the table)
Faridah *came in* about half an hour *ago*.
Perhaps she *brought* the book. Yes, here it is.
Halim: Thank you, George.

Notice the degree of control. All the sentence patterns and most of the vocabulary have already been introduced. (as such as "brought" (irregular past tense) and "ago" are also included because they are useful. These might have been taught the previous term, or the previous year, but they need revising and using again in new contexts if pupils are to attain competence in English.

Here are some other examples of dialogues. The Syllabus Items are taken from the post - 1970 English Syllabus for National Primary Schools in Malaysia.

Items 23, 17, 14, 13, 12, etc. (Standard 1)

Shopping

Halim: Good morning, Che' Radziah.
Radziah: Good Morning, Enche' Halim.
Please show me the bananas.
Halim: These are good bananas, Che' Radziah.
Radziah: Please give me six bananas.
Halim: Certainly. One, two, three, four, five, six bananas.
Radziah: Thank you, Enche' Halim.

(Many variations on the "shopping" situation are possible).

Items 48 - 45 etc. (Standard 2)

Getting ready for a picnic.

Mother: Asmah, put these boxes in the basket.
Asmah: What is in them?
Mother: There are sandwiches, nasi goreng, oranges and mangosteens.
Ali: Have you got a bottle of lemonade?
Mother: Yes, I have. There are three bottles.
Get them from the kitchen cupboard.
Father: (from outside) Hurry up! Where is the basket?

Mother: Asmah, take the basket to the car.
Give it to your father.
Ali: I have the bottles of lemonade, Mother.
Mother: Good! Come on! Your father is waiting.

The following points may be noted:

- (a) The dialogues are short enough to be done in one lesson or in part of a lesson.
- (b) The language is controlled. No sentence patterns are used that have not already been presented and practised. A few new words may be introduced provided the situation and apparatus used make the meaning clear.
- (c) The situations involve a few simple actions which help pupils' understanding.
- (d) By substituting other words, a dialogue may be used several times. For example, in the "Shopping" dialogue above, the names can be changed, the woman asks for other kinds of fruit, and she may buy three papayas.
- (e) Pupils enjoy saying and acting the dialogues.

The second part of this article will deal mainly with how to present and use dialogues with primary classes.

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In the first part of this article, there were some remarks on the value of prepared dialogues, together with a few examples. Now we will consider effective procedures for presenting and practising a dialogue. This should be done orally so that pupils can concentrate on understanding and saying the sentences without at this stage having the additional task of recognizing print.

- (a) Introduce the dialogue orally while pupils listen and watch. Use blackboard sketches, pictures or flannelboard figures of the characters (usually only two or three). Point to the appropriate character as you repeat his words. Do this twice. Use suitable gestures and actions. Do not vary the sentences. To avoid doing this, you may have a written copy of the dialogue in your hand to refer to, but you should, of course, already know the dialogue as a result of having practised your own pronunciation, intonation and rhythm beforehand.
- (b) Ask a few simple questions about who the characters are, what happens, etc. If no one can answer, present the dialogue again.
- (c) Divide the class into as many groups as there are characters. (No moving about is necessary.) Pupils

repeat the sentences after the teacher. Change groups and repeat.

- (d) By now, pupils have heard the dialogue several times. Try to get them to repeat it again, this time only prompting them as necessary. Generally one or two key words, or the first word in a sentence, are sufficient.
- (e) Have pairs or small groups of pupils repeat the dialogue at the front of the class. Encourage them to use simple actions. Prompt them when they need it.

Pupils can usually master a dialogue in this way in about 20 minutes, that is, more quickly than adults can.

- (f) Come back to the dialogue again in another lesson, this time using a few substitutions. Make a point also of using similar patterns and phrases in the course of classroom routine. The object is to enable pupils to use the patterns in a variety of situations, not merely to memorize a few sentences.

Reading and writing work arise naturally out of a dialogue. As desired, after the oral stage has been mastered, pupils can read the dialogue from the blackboard or write out a part or the whole of it. For the reading, a useful piece of equipment is a "roll-up blackboard" (cheap to make, like a wall map, but made of plastic or other material suitable for writing on with chalk). At the opportune moment, the blackboard, on which you have already written the dialogue, can be unrolled. Children are most impressed by this, and if the teacher can manage to sit down and say nothing at this point, the pupils will often read the dialogue for themselves quite fluently.

This can be followed by getting individual pupils to point out particular words and phrases, and to match flashcards with words on the roll-up blackboard. The blackboard should be hung low enough for them to be able to do this easily.

For written work, pupils can be asked to copy any number of sentences, perhaps after you have rubbed out a few structure words first. Pupils then supply the erased words as they write. For example:

– did you give it – ?

Most of the written work done in this way will be completely correct. Pupils' own copies of dialogues can later be used for revision. For example, ask pupils to read their work silently as a prelude to acting a dialogue and again for a few minutes at the end of a lesson.

If the reader is by now convinced that dialogues can be an effective aid for teaching English, he may ask where he can get a collection of suitable dialogues. Some are included in "The Teachers' Handbook for the post – 1970 Primary School English Syllabus (Items 1 – 64)" published in February 1971 by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, at a price of \$1.50. This Handbook covers the syllabus items for Standards 1 and 2. Many more dialogues will be introduced in the Handbooks for Standards 3 – 6 now being prepared by the Ministry of Education.

Two titles which teachers may find useful for reference are:

Easy English Dialogues Books 1 and 2 by Michael West (Longman)

Conversation Exercises in Everyday English Books 1 and 2 by M. F. Jerrom and L. L. Szkutnik (Longman)

The first of these gives guidance on how to use substitutions. The second is marked for stress and intonation which will help a teacher wishing to improve his own spoken English. However, the dialogues in these books are not entirely suitable for primary classes, though many could be adapted to suit your own school. No collection of dialogues for primary schools in Malaysia has yet been produced. Perhaps members of SELTA and readers of this journal can fill the gap?