

# Introduction

## *Components of a typical lesson*

No two lessons are the same. However, there are a number of components which need to be considered in lesson planning. In order to be successful, a lesson generally has to be varied and interesting for the students and, at the same time, leave them with a sense of achievement.

There are general guidelines which will ensure this and what follows should be seen in that light. It would be a serious error to mistake it for a 'model' lesson to be copied at all times and in all circumstances. It is a set of guidelines for a sample lesson in which new language is introduced to the students and meaningful opportunities for practice given.

### **START OF LESSON: AIM**

The beginning of the lesson needs to be clear and purposeful. It is necessary to explain, in simple terms, even in English, the aim of the lesson. This provides a clear context and helps the learners to make sense of new language, by enhancing their ability to guess the meanings and by giving them a set of clues to guide them.

### **REVIEW**

Before introducing the new language, there should be a brief warm-up of language which has already been covered and which will usefully contribute to the students' understanding of the new language. So, for example, if the students are being taught the time, it is important to review the numbers thoroughly beforehand. If the new language relates to asking prices and paying, it might be useful to review food and drink and numbers. Usually, the content of the lesson suggests what review is most appropriate.

### **INPUT**

New language should then be presented orally to the students in a gradual way, i.e. with an element of grading which is appropriate to the age and stage of the students. While input is going on, it is useful to spread questions around the classroom, so that all students can participate.

Errors should be handled sensitively so that students do not feel embarrassed about getting things wrong. A useful technique for correcting stubborn errors is to move from the student who is unable to produce the desired language, to a student who is more confident

(preferably one sitting close to the student who made the original error) and, once a correct answer has been elicited, to return to the first student, so that he/she has a second opportunity to produce a correct answer.

### **FEEDBACK**

After an oral presentation of the new language, it is useful to ask students if they have spotted the pattern/regularity and to confirm or reject their hypotheses. This is the point when explanations of grammatical points can help clarify and categorize the knowledge which the students have just gained about an aspect of the Spanish language.

### **CONSOLIDATION**

Once the pattern has been established, the transfer from oral to written practice can take place. Students copy the model and, if necessary, the pattern can be highlighted once more, taking advantage of the visual support.

### **PRACTICE**

This is the point where listening activities, group- or pairwork and written exercises are presented. They should all contain an appropriate element of grading.

### **PRODUCTION**

It is important that there is a clear functional outcome to each new stage in language learning, which allows the students to combine the language they may already know with the language they have just learned. This encourages them to see that the language is real and can be used for getting things done, as well as giving them a sense of making progress.

### **END**

The end of the lesson should be orderly and you should think about appropriate activities/exercises, within the capabilities of the students, which they might be asked to do in their own time and which will encourage them to maintain their interest in the language.

### **GENERAL**

Two important overall considerations should be made. Firstly, as teachers, you must endeavour to use the target language as much as is possible and appropriate. Secondly, all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) should be involved and combined in the lesson.

## Stages of language learning

In order to achieve efficient learning, it is important for us to recognize the three main stages into which all language learning activity can be categorized:

- Input
- Practice
- Production.

By classifying activities according to the stage into which they best fit, you can identify which tasks are appropriate at any given point, and create a framework for judging the suitability of additional exercises and activities which you may wish to consider for inclusion in a lesson, or as part of an additional task for students.

Each chapter of this *Instructor's Manual* is structured following this pattern, so that you can easily identify the stage of learning which is being supported at any given point in the course. It is therefore important to recognize some of the kinds of activities which are involved at each stage and to describe how they should be approached in the classroom context.

### INPUT

The input stage is the point at which the meaning of new language is made clear to the learners and they are given examples of appropriate use, which can form the basis of their own model of the language. This model will be key to their being able to manipulate the language properly for their own purposes and to develop successfully an appropriate model of the way in which Spanish conveys meanings.

#### Selection

If learning is to be efficient, then input in the foreign language needs to be prepared very carefully. For it is only by short-circuiting the natural learning process, by means of careful selection, sequencing and grading of language, that the learners can eventually reach similar levels of communicative competence to those of the native speaker.

The writers of *Sueños* have selected language which satisfies the criteria outlined above. It balances the need to provide examples of language which might be encountered in a 'natural' context of language use, with the need to select language which helps the learners to see the regularities of the language and thus help them to build their own model of how the language works. In practice, this means that, rather than simply selecting language on the basis of situations and/or functions, it is also necessary to take into consideration structural elements of the language.

Consequently, selection involves, on most occasions, choosing language that can be learned from, rather than simply learned, language that is plausible, rather than simply 'authentic', and language that has a high transfer value – i.e. can be used in many different contexts, rather than specific to one given context and/or time.

### Sequencing

Young children learn their first language by a process of trial and error, which involves testing out hypotheses about how the language works. This process of hypothesis formulation, testing and adaptation is also present in many other facets of human learning.

Through this process of discovery, which hypothesis formulation and testing involves, humans learn to make predictions about the behaviour and attitudes of others, and even about everyday events like the weather.

Therefore, the process of inputting new language needs to build on the learners' existing tendency to formulate and test hypotheses, to look for regularities and to establish 'the rule'. This will help to build confidence in learners about their own ability to deduce the rules and regularities of the language which they are learning.

This is particularly the case with students engaged in courses with a large self-access component. Unless they are encouraged to look for regularities in the foreign language and to build their own model of how the foreign language works, they are likely to engage in exercises which put a great deal of emphasis on memorizing unanalyzed chunks of language.

Given the limitations imposed by the impoverished context of the foreign language classroom, structural elements – the scaffolding of the language – need to be highlighted in order to improve the efficiency with which students formulate their hypotheses and to assist them in remembering newly-discovered structures in meaningful categories.

This does not mean spending time discussing structural elements of the target language in the learners' mother tongue, as the starting point for foreign language learning, as was previously the case in grammar-based approaches. Rather, it means trying to expose learners to language which has been carefully selected and sequenced. Then, by means of judicious graded presentations, they can be helped to develop their own model of how a given aspect of the Spanish language works.

After the input of the new language items in Spanish, it is necessary to ensure that the learners have correctly identified the regularities of the particular structure of the language, by confirming or rejecting their hypotheses.

### GRADING

If learners are to feel comfortable about using the language, you need to introduce the new language gradually, beginning with simple forms and building up to the most complex. The most useful way to achieve this is through grading of questions which allow the learners to move from simple to complex statements by means of carefully planned steps.

It is important to recognize that such grading of input is not artificial. Nor is it exclusive to the foreign

language learning context. Indeed, it is readily observable in the so-called 'caretaker speech' which takes place between adults and small children. Adults tend to adapt their use of language to suit the needs of the child, and if the meaning is not clear, they will elicit an appropriate response by asking a series of questions, which are themselves graded according to level of difficulty. As teachers, you too need to adapt your use of language in a similar way, to suit the needs of the learners.

Additionally, it is essential in language learning, as in all other areas of teaching, to give positive feedback and encouragement to the learners. Adult learners do not find it patronizing or inappropriate if their efforts are praised. Indeed they are more likely to feel encouraged to persevere when the going gets more difficult. ¡Eso es! ¡Bien! ¡Muy bien! ¡Excelente! ¡Perfecto! or even ¡Fenomenal! can all be used for this purpose.

For the purposes of foreign language teaching, it is helpful to make use of five levels of grading. It is important to stress at this point that input at each of the five levels demands a certain degree of briskness and flexibility, if students are to derive benefit from the activity and are not to be left with a feeling of tedium.

In order to illustrate the different levels below, assume that the time is being taught, in particular, expressions for the hours on the clock.

### 1 Repetition

This level is important in allowing the students to become familiar with the pronunciation of Spanish and to have the opportunity to practise pronunciation. As with all levels, there are usually two stages: group followed by individual. Before each one, it is important to provide the students with a model answer to emulate.

- a) In the first stage, the learners are given the opportunity to hear and repeat in a group. This provides a context which is protective of the individual and which allows students to practise making 'foreign' sounds in the anonymity of a group, without feeling embarrassed or intimidated.
- b) The second stage involves repetition by individuals and it provides a useful opportunity to identify errors in pronunciation or in auditory perception at an early stage, when correction can prove considerably effective. In such a situation, it is important to move briskly around the class inviting students, or a sample of students, to repeat a given phrase or item of vocabulary.

### 2 True/False

The second level of grading involves the learners in identifying whether a particular auditory signal corresponds with a presented image or some other visual stimulant, such as an OHT or a video recording. This level of grading can be particularly useful in the

initial phase of language learning, when learners are still becoming familiar with the new sounds of the language. Here, you could hold up a clockface depicting six o'clock and say, in an enquiring tone: ¿Son las siete? ¿Sí o no? (¿Verdad o falso?)

### 3 Alternatives

The third level of grading involves the learners in selecting from a number of alternatives. So, using the example of time, hold up the clockface depicting three o'clock and ask: ¿Son las tres o son las cinco? Then elicit the answer from students: Son las tres.

### 4 No + correct answer

The penultimate level of grading requires the learners to spot an incorrect statement and to correct it. At this point, hold up a clockface depicting four o'clock and, using a questioning tone, say to the students: ¿Son las seis? This elicits the answer: No, son las cuatro.

### 5 Target question

The final level of grading presents the most difficult kind of question to the learners, who have no support in ascertaining the answer. Yet, curiously, it is frequently the first question which students face in the foreign language classroom. As its name suggests, the aim of the target question is to elicit the response which uses the newly-learned language in a totally unsupported manner.

Target questions are easily identifiable because they usually include one of the interrogative words: ¿Quién? ¿Qué? ¿Cuál? ¿Cuándo? ¿Dónde? ¿Por qué? At this level, hold up a clockface depicting six o'clock and ask: ¿Qué hora es? This elicits the answer: Son las seis.

### The purpose of grading

These stages of grading not only provide a useful guide for levels of difficulty, in terms of input, but they also provide a helpful diagnostic matrix for identifying learners' errors and level of comprehension of given structures. Frequently, students may not be able to answer a target question, where they will be able to answer a question which offers alternative answers. Progress can be made by taking the students up through the levels of grading from the level at which they are able to answer confidently, to a level of greater independence.

All language can be graded using the above formula, though it is not always necessary to use every stage of the grading for all learners. The key guiding principles to be applied in deciding which levels of grading you need to use will be the same as for other aspects of input, namely, what is appropriate to the age and stage of the learners?

As with grammar-based approaches, there exists the grave danger of turning this activity, from what is an essential tool of language teaching, into an instrument of drudgery by applying grading in a mechanical

fashion. This can have disastrous consequences for teaching, not least because of the effect on learners' motivation as a result of the boredom they experience. It is therefore essential to consider the needs of the students and their level of understanding, when deciding which levels of grading are appropriate.

So, for example, with a group of students who have been studying Spanish for one term and who are familiar with the graded approach, it might be appropriate to move directly from the repetition level to the alternatives level and from there straight to using target questions, ignoring the intermediate stages. This is something which you must decide in the light of your knowledge of the students.

### **PROVIDING MEANINGFUL CONTEXT**

If the skills of hypothesis formulation and testing are to be further developed and utilized in the foreign language classroom, support for meaning needs to be provided. The provision of a meaningful context which helps clarify the meaning of the spoken or written language enables the learners and you to avoid over-reliance on the mother tongue.

Rich contextual clues to meaning cannot therefore be regarded as simply an optional component of any language course, but must be an indispensable component of good practice in the foreign language classroom. Moreover, if the contextual clues which you provide for the students are supportive of meaning, it will help to avoid the need for the use of complex grammatical terminology, which, in the initial stages of language learning, at least, only make difficult concepts even more abstract.

In the initial stages, contextual support for learning will inevitably be visual: flashcards, realia, OHTs, etc. However, as the learners progress, language which is already known will come to form part of the context for meaning of new language. If the learners know the months of the year, for example, then it will be possible to teach them the seasons through the medium of the target language, by describing the seasons in terms of the months of the year, and the weather, for example, in terms of the seasons.

This is an important principle of language teaching which helps to maximize use of the target language. That is to say, after the initial stages of language learning, the target language provides its own context, and new language items and structures can be explained in terms of known items and structures.

### **PAIR- AND GROUPWORK**

Pairwork has a number of important advantages in the foreign language classroom, which are worth enumerating. In the first place, it allows for maximum use of the target language. Students can usually practise listening, reading and writing at home, but they have

little opportunity to speak the language. Pairwork gives the opportunity for additional practice.

Pairwork reduces the anxiety level for those students who are shy about 'performing' in front of the class. Moreover, students tend to react better to correction by their peers in a small group than they do to public correction by their teacher.

Pair- and groupwork allow for variation in the pace of the lesson and thus obviate boredom and maintain interest.

Finally, pairwork allows us to move away from 'front stage' and circulate among the students to monitor and correct or help those students who are having difficulty.

But, of course, in order to be successful, pairwork needs to be set up properly, beginning with the recognition that it is a follow-up or practice activity and not an activity for presenting new language. It allows students to practise language that has been newly presented and, sometimes, to extend it.

The stage at which pairwork is appropriate is important because most of the problems which stem from pairwork are the result of insufficient preparation of the language that students require to accomplish the set task. This leads to a whole series of problems, the most common of which are error practice (students have not had sufficient opportunity to hear the language before engaging in pairwork and so produce incorrect variations) and so-called 'TV talk' (students have failed to understand the activity, often because their teacher has failed to explain clearly what is required, and so they resort to talking about what they saw on TV the previous night).

#### **Suitable activities for pairwork**

- a) Using some of the levels of grading, students take turns asking each other questions, perhaps based on a grid on an OHT. This need not last more than a few minutes and requires no written work.
- b) Dialogues – new language can be embedded in a dialogue and students can practise graded activities based on it. This provides a useful transition to reading and writing, in which the students match sound and the written form aloud.  
  
Dialogues can be graded, beginning with students simply reading aloud, before doing substitution activities and then moving on to free dialogues.
- c) Role plays – these involve more open use of new structures or patterns in scenes. They can have instructions/guidance for the students in writing, in English or in symbols.
- d) Information-gap – these involve activities in which the students are required, by using the target language, to discover information which their partner has, at the same time as passing on, to their partner, information which they have and their

partner does not. It can also include comparison of pictures, or finding out information about their partner's likes and dislikes and other such mini-surveys.

The main features of these activities are that they involve a more meaningful context for the new language, can be graded to suit the level of the student and can involve more than simply listening or speaking. Once students have completed the task, it is important to get feedback by inviting some of them to demonstrate for the rest of the class what they have just practised.

#### **Avoiding problems**

In conducting pairwork, problems can be avoided or minimized by observing the following guidelines:

- a) Build up gradually the amount of time which students are involved in pairwork.
- b) Give clear instructions and a demonstration, where necessary.
- c) Circulate and monitor the students' performance.
- d) Ensure feedback at the end, i.e. a performance by the students or correction of an information-gap activity.
- e) Provide students with a talkcard or worksheet to focus their attention and keep them working 'on task'.

#### **WORKSHEETS**

Practice activities can be provided by means other than pair- and groupwork. But, in order to be successful, they need to satisfy a number of criteria. Firstly, there must be a clear purpose to them, i.e. one which identifies particular structures/lexical sets which students are required to recognize or manipulate. Secondly, it is important to be clear about the prior knowledge of the language which you assume the students to have. Thirdly, you need to draw a clear distinction between teaching, in which students are assisted in learning new language, and testing, where you are interested in finding out what the students know.

It is perhaps worth underlining this point, for it is one which is a source of difficulties in the foreign language classroom. The purpose of testing is to measure how much and how well students have learned (and indeed you have taught) new language. Do not believe that, by means of testing, students are going to make a great deal of progress. Indeed, as is known from other aspects of human development, human beings do not grow taller by virtue of being measured. The only valid purpose of testing in the classroom is diagnostic.

#### **ORDER OF SKILLS**

The usual order in which skills are practised is aural to oral, and reading to writing. A good, general rule is that beginner students should not be required to say what they have not heard, to read what they have not said, or to write what they have not read.

##### **Aural**

Students listen to a series of short conversations/dialogues and tick a chart or fill a grid with appropriate symbols to show they have correctly identified the spoken word. This grid can form the basis of a whole series of activities including pairwork and writing, to give further, mixed-skill practice in the new language.

##### **Oral**

As previously discussed, pair- and groupwork are particularly useful as a means of giving practice. Students can practise asking and answering questions on a grid which depicts fruits, or on a train timetable or they could base their discussion on a picture of, say, the interior of a house, or on a diagram. An information-gap paircard can also form the basis of the activity.

##### **Reading/Writing**

It is not without reason that reading has been labelled the 'forgotten third skill'. Yet a great variety of activities can be devised to give suitable practice in this skill, both on its own and in conjunction with other skills.

Using grids derived from initial oral practice, a whole series of graded exercises can be done, beginning with recognition activities where the students match words/phrases with pictures, trace directions based on written instructions, join two parts of a sentence, answer true or false questions, or select the correct answer in a multiple-choice activity.

They can then move on to comprehension activities involving answering questions based on signs, letters, short written dialogues, letters, short articles, etc.

Finally, they can engage in reading activities which require skimming short passages for gist or scanning for specific information. These activities do not require a complex text, but can be used from the earliest stages using simple dialogues.

##### **Writing**

As with other skills, learning to write in the foreign language needs to be staged. Activities need to move from purely reproductive activities, involving copying and using model answers, through less reproductive stages where students have to select from alternative answers and correct wrong answers, to productive activities which require students to answer target questions and compose their own texts by, for example, making up dialogues, writing letters and writing descriptions.