

Glyn S. Hughes

A Handbook of **Classroom
English**

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Glynn Hughes
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A Handbook of Classroom English:

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Аннотация

This practical handbook is for trainee teachers who want to acquire accurate, authentic, and idiomatic classroom language, and for experienced teachers who want to extend the range of their classroom English.

Содержание

INTRODUCTION

7

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

14

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INTRODUCTION

Overall objectives

The aim of this book is to present and practise the language required by the teacher of English in the practical day-to-day management of classes. It is intended for two main groups of readers:

1 Trainee teachers. By working systematically through the materials in the book and applying them directly in the preparation of lesson plans, in micro-teaching sessions and actual demonstration lessons, students will acquire a wide range of accurate, authentic and idiomatic classroom phrases that will be of value throughout their teaching careers.

2 Teachers in the field. It is assumed that this group will already have attained a certain level of classroom competence, although experience suggests that there may be recurrent inaccuracies, or even an unwillingness to use English for classroom management purposes. It is hoped that this book will encourage experienced teachers to make more use of English and help them to extend the area of operation of their classroom English; for example, in running a language laboratory session in English.

The rather different needs of these two groups have meant that the format of the book is a compromise between a textbook and a work of reference.

Rationale

Teaching is considered primarily in terms of methodological problems and practical solutions to these problems. As a result teachers in training spend considerable time acquiring the basis of sound methodological habits for the presentation, practice and testing of learning items. It is, however, often forgotten that the classroom procedures derived from a particular method almost invariably have to be verbalized. In other words, instructions have to be given, groups formed, time limits set, questions asked, answers confirmed, discipline maintained, and so on. The role of this linguistic interaction is perhaps one of the least understood aspects of teaching, but it is clearly crucial to the success of the teaching/learning event.

Whatever the subject taught, all teachers require this specialized classroom competence and should be trained in it. Foreign language teachers in particular require linguistic training aimed at the classroom situation since, if they believe in the maximum use of the L2, that is, the language being taught, they are obliged to use it both as the goal of their teaching and as the prime medium of instruction and classroom management. Despite the linguistic demands of the L2 teaching situation,

foreign language graduates are seldom adequately prepared for the seemingly simple task of running a class in the L2. The nature of the first-degree study programme may have meant that there was no opportunity to practise the key classroom functions of organization and interrogation, or teacher training units may be unwilling to interfere in what appears to be an aspect of ‘knowledge of subject’. The result is generally that the trainee teacher acquires a very limited repertoire of classroom phrases, or makes as little use of the L2 as possible. In both cases there is likely to be a detrimental effect on learning:

‘Our data indicate that teacher competence in the foreign language – however acquired – makes a significant difference in student outcomes. ... The data appear to indicate that neither the sheer amount of teachers’ university training in the foreign language, nor the amount of travel and residence in a foreign country, makes any particular difference in student outcomes. From the standpoint of teacher selection and training, this means that any measures taken that would increase teacher competence would have positive effects...’

John B. Carroll,

The Teaching of French as a Foreign Language in Eight Countries.

(1975) pp. 277–8.

An extremely important element of overall teaching success is careful advance planning, but equally important is the teacher’s flexibility in the actual classroom situation, i.e., the teacher’s

willingness and ability to deviate from a lesson plan, for example in order to make use of the pupils' own interests and suggestions, or to devote more time to individual learning difficulties. In the case of L2 teaching, such flexibility makes heavy demands on the teacher's foreign language skills, although the result may provide a learning bonus for the pupils:

'For the teaching of listening comprehension and spoken skills, more informal methods of language teaching are advisable – involving massive exposure of the student to the meaningful situational use of the language. One way of accomplishing this, our data strongly suggest, is to emphasize the use of the foreign language in the classroom, allowing the use of the mother tongue only where necessary to explain meanings of words and grammatical features of the language.'

The theoretical starting point of this book is that the classroom situation *is* a genuine social environment which allows 'the meaningful situational use of the language', and that its communicative potential is closer to real interaction than is often assumed. This view probably requires some further explanation:

1 Language is a tool and not a museum exhibit. As such one of its primary functions is to communicate information. In the classroom information gaps occur repeatedly, that is, the teacher has new information which the pupils require in order to continue participating in the lesson, or the pupils have answers which the teacher needs in order to know whether to proceed to the next stage of the lesson.

These information gaps provide opportunities for language to be used communicatively. The phrase '*Open your books at page 10, please*' is not something the pupils repeat, translate, evaluate as true or false or put into the negative, but a genuine instruction which is followed by the simple action of opening a textbook. It is perhaps an interesting paradox that whereas teachers are quite willing to spend time practising key structures in phrases like '*Cows eat grass*' and '*Is John your mother?*', they may well switch to the LI in order to set the day's homework. The reason very often put forward for this is that the pupils may not understand! Any naive pupil may come to the very understandable conclusion that English is basically a very tedious subject since all the information it conveys is either known or meaningless. The instinctive reaction to a question like '*Who has got a grandmother?*', for example, in the classroom situation is to repeat it, or answer it by reference to the text being dealt with. Only in the last resort will it be considered a personal question. Fortunately, this kind of pedagogic ambiguity is usually avoided when the teacher adds the necessary functional label: 'No, I'm asking *you*.'

2 Much of the language put into the mouths of learners in the name of practice may well have little direct application outside the classroom, but many classroom management phrases can be transferred to 'normal' social situations, *e. g. Could you open the window; I'm sorry, I didn't catch that*. By using these phrases the teacher is demonstrating their contextualized use and indirectly accustoming the pupils to the form-function relationships (and discrepancies) that

are part of English. Exposure to this aspect of language is particularly important in the case of polite requests.

3 Classroom situations and procedures are generally quite concrete, which means that most classroom phrases have a very clear situational link. This fact should allow the teacher to vary the form of the instructions given as part of the learning process. For example, given a specific context (repetition after the tape) which is familiar to the pupils, the teacher should be able to choose from '*All together*', '*The whole class*', '*Everybody*', '*Not just this row*', '*Boys as well*', '*In chorus*', or '*Why don't you join in?*' and the pupils should be able to react appropriately. In fact, by varying the phrases used in any particular situation, the teacher is giving the pupils a number of free learning bonuses. The pupil is hearing new vocabulary in context and at the same time developing the important skill of guessing the meaning of new words on the basis of the context. Similarly, the teacher can deliberately use a structure that is going to be taught actively in the coming lessons and so 'pre-expose' the pupils to it. For example, the future tense might be pre-exposed by choosing 'now we shall listen to a story' instead of 'let's listen'. Systematic variation is then a valuable pedagogic tool.

4 There still perhaps exists a belief that (i) pupils cannot really understand a sentence they hear unless they are able to break it up into separate words and explain the function of each of the words, and (ii) pupils at early stages should be able to say everything they hear in the lesson, and not hear anything that they are not able to say; in other

words, there should be a 1:1 input-output ratio. This point of view implies that pupils at an elementary level would not understand '*Would you mind opening the door?*' and therefore they should not hear it since this type of structure occurs later in the textbook under the headings 'conditional' and 'gerund'. Clearly, however, the phrase '*Would you mind opening the door?*' can be understood in the simplest communicative sense on the basis of the key words '*open*' and '*door*'. The pupil may hear the '*Would you mind*' as a meaningless noise which will only be 'understood', i.e. broken up into its separate parts, later when the pupil has more experience of the language. If it is accepted that pupils may well understand more than they can say, it means that the teacher's choice of classroom phrases can exceed the pupils' productive abilities. This means, then, that the classroom can provide opportunities for the pupils to hear genuine uncontrolled language used for genuine communicative purposes. Because classroom activities are so diverse it is tempting to suggest that an entire teaching syllabus, even methodology, could be built around the use of classroom management phrases.

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