THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGE FUNC-
TIONS
A SYSTEMATIC OBJECTIVE BASED
APPROACH

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At present many foreign language educators derive their wisdom in matters of classroom teaching mainly from linguistics and its related fields of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics and hardly consult mainstream educationists, especially those working in the field of general instruction design (Politzer, 1981:31; Stern, 1983:419). Consequently, many of the developments in the area of instruction design have seen their way to but a limited number of foreign language classrooms. This paper tries to introduce one such development, viz, the application of a systematic objective-based approach to the teaching of language functions and notions.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into a detailed discussion of the principles and characteristics of a learning system. However, it may suffice to point out that a learing system consists of a number of components that interact with one another in order to achieve a well specified learning objective. (See Gagne and Briggs 1974, 1979 for further discussion of a learning system). The approach we are presenting here is a modified version of Gagne and Brigg's design and we have developed it in an attempt to make our training of ●EFl teachers more effective.

This approach comprises four interedependent phases, namely, a planning phase, a presentation phase, a practice phase and an evaluation phase. The components of the system, which also interact with one another, are the teacher, the pupils, any other teaching aids such as books, taperecorders, a chalkboard, etc.

●EFl: English as a Foreign Language

The planning phase

Long before a teacher enters a classroom, she/he must be clear in mind about:

a) What the pupils are supposed to learn,
b) the appropriate teaching materials, aids and tactics,
c) the types of practice activities to be used and
d) the evaluation instruments she/he will use to make sure that the pupils have learnt what they were intended to learn

Specifying lesson objectives

Lesson objectives are to be derived from course goals, but unlike course goals, lesson objectives must be specific about:

a) the object of the lesson, i.e. what the pupils will be learning whether these are skills, grammatical rules, language functions or notions,

b) the behavior the pupils will show in order for us to ascertain that they have acheived their lesson objective,

c) the conditions or situations in which the pupils will perform and

d) (perhaps) the time by the end of which they are expected to achieve the lesson objective(s). (For a detailed discussion of writing lesson objectives see Mager 1974, Hamed el Nil el Fadil, 1985).

We will take as an example for this exposition the following statement of objective:

By the end of the unit (TIME TARGET), the pupils will be able to express likes (OBJECT), by using: 'I'd rather have a/an '(BEHAVIOR), in response to: 'what would you rather have a/an or a/an ?'(CONDITION).

Task analysis

Once we have stated our lesson objectives in terms of pupil learning, we need to carry out a task analysis. By this we mean the breaking down of a learning objective into its constituent components so as to find out the rules and concepts a student must know before she/he can learn the desired objective. These are sometimes called prerequisites or enabling objectives. (See Gagne and Briggs 1974, 1979 pp 97-116 for a further discussion of task analysis).

For example, in order to respond to the question: 'What would you rather have a pepsi or a coke?' a student may need to recall, a) the grammatical uses of: 'would rather,' 'have' and 'or', b) the names of soft and hot drinks and perhaps also the names of some fruits, and c) the Western social habit that a host usually offers his or her guest a choice and that the guest is to feel no misgivings in expressing his or her likes.

Selection of content, tactics and teaching aids

In addition, to the finding out of learning prerequisites for the particular objective to be achieved, a task analysis can also reveal the new rules and notions to be learned, the steps in which the learning must proceed and the learning capability or capabilities required for learning the objective. This kind of knowledge is useful in making decisions about the selection of teaching materials, the appropriate procedures for teaching and learning, and the most effective and available teaching aids.
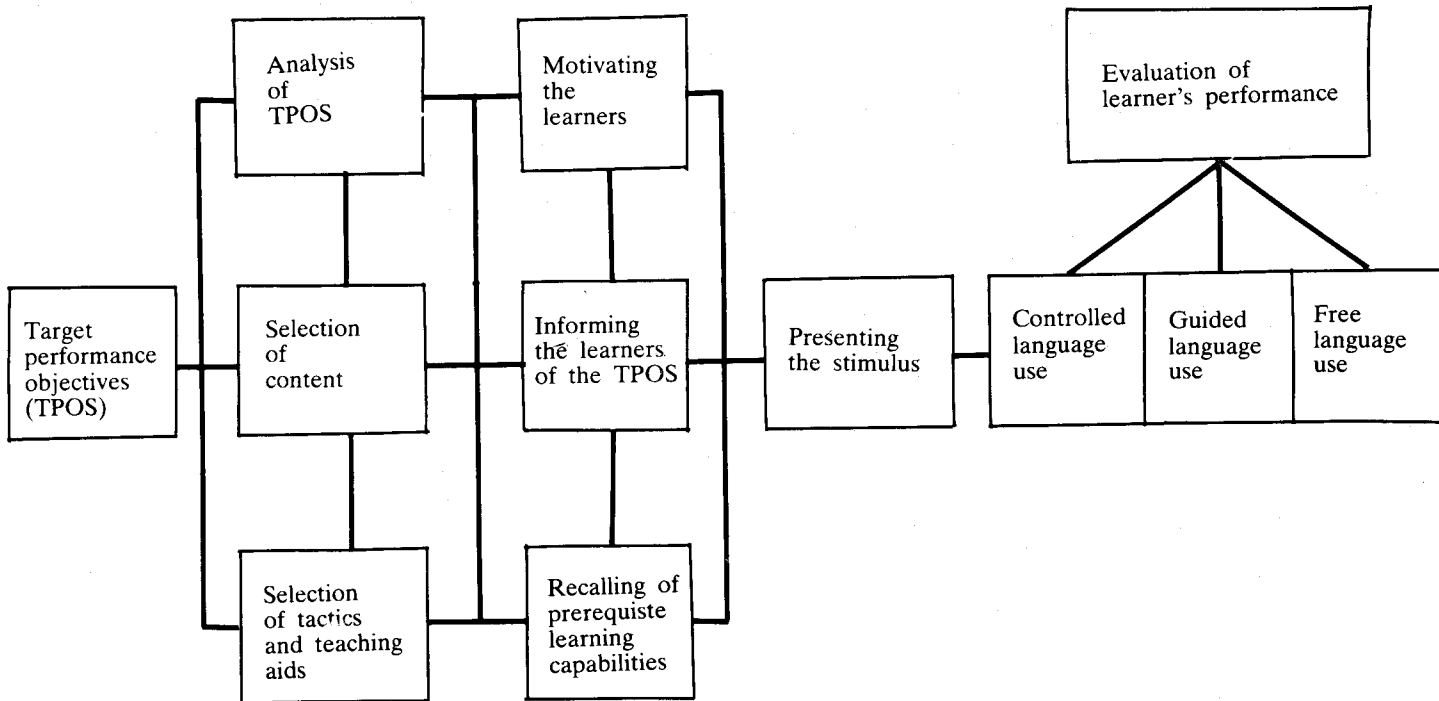
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Fig. 1. A flow chart of the phases and sub-phases of an instructional unit in TEFL/TESL.*

*TEFL/TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign
Language and Teaching English as a Second Language.

With reference to the example we are discussing the teacher can begin his/her lesson by asking the pupils, and in their own native language if need be: 'When you have guests at home, what do you usually offer them?' 'Do you usually give them a choice, or do you offer them everything that you have?' These kinds of questions often elicit different kinds of responses, specially if the pupils come from different cultural groups. Some may say that they offer their guests a choice; others say that they must offer their guests everything that they have (as an expression of their generosity) and that the guests have to try everything that is being offered to them. Such responses usually give rise to very interesting discussions, which again enhance the pupils' motivation.

As the pupils will undoubtedly mention some of the things that they usually offer, this can form the bases for recalling some of the prerequisites for learning this objective, viz, names of soft drinks, hot drinks, fruits etc. It is here that the teacher can make use of the poster with the names and pictures of drinks and fruits.

Having helped the pupils recall these notions, then the teacher can help them recall the use of such grammatical items such as: 'What?' 'would rather,' 'or,' etc. The teacher can do this by asking his pupils to respond to questions such as: 'Would you rather be a teacher or a doctor?' 'What would you rather be, a teacher or a doctor?' Depending on how the pupils respond to these questions, the teacher can decide if there is a need for further work on these points or not.

There remains one more thing to recall, namely the habit of offering a guest a choice that is common amongst native speakers of English. The teacher can, therefore, tell her or his pupils that native speakers of English usually offer their guests a choice and that the guest should feel free to express his likes. The teacher may also point out that this is contrary to some of our habits.

By now the pupils will be affectively and intellectually ready to learn the specified language function and consequently the teacher can inform them they are now going to learn how to express their likes in English when given a choice of something to drink or to eat by a native speaker of English.

The explanning of the new rules and notions

At this phase the teacher will need to explain any unfamiliar grammatical rules or notions which are basic for the acquiring of the specified performance. Some brows may be raised at this comment, simply because we are presently greatly influenced by trends that emphasise natural language acquisition and underplay the role of formal grammar. Despite this it is my strong contention that one can always find a place and a role for the explanation of some grammatical rules, depending, of course, on the age and the learning traditions of the pupils.

However, with respect to our present example, there is not a lot of explanning to do, partly because some of these rules and notions have already been recalled and partly because this particular example does not have rules to be explained. The teacher may only need to explain, by giving examples, that native speakers of English use the phrase, 'would rather', to express a choice.

Having done this the teacher can now play the recorded conversation two or three times. The first listening should be for getting the gist and general meaning of the conversation. The second and third listening (if necessary)

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Concerning the choice of teaching content for the example we are discussing here, we may need to write a short conversation of a host offering his or her guests something to drink or to eat. This conversation must a) be as authentic as possible, b) contain a few number of unfamiliar vocabulary or cultural items, c) be recorded (if possible) in the voices of native and non-native speakers of English, and d) contain many repetitions of the to-be-learned response.

In connection with the choice of teaching aids we will need to do the following things. First, we will need to record the conversation and, therfore, we will need to have, a) a cassette recorder, b) native speakers of English, c) non-native speakers, and d) a blank cassette. Second, we will need to prepare a poster with the names and pictures of a suitable number of soft and hot drinks as well as some fruits. Third, we will need to prepare a substitution table as the one in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3.

With respect to the selection of tactics we will need to determine first how the teacher can best a) introduce and explain the to-be-learnt language function, b) facilitate student learning of this language function and c) know that the students have learnt.

To pursue with our example we suggest the following tactics:

Firstly, the introducing and explanation of the to-be-learnt language function and notions can best be done through, a) verbal communications to be made by the teacher, b) listening to the recorded conversations, and c) studying the poster.

Secondly, the learning of the language functions and notions can best be achieved through progressive practice where the students are helped to progress from controlled language use, through guided language use to free language use. Each of these three sub-phases will have its own language drills as well as its own level of achievement (see The practice phase below for further discussion of this point).

Thirdly, we will need to prepare some instruments for evaluating student achievement. This is mainly formative evaluation, which will provide us with important feedback about the effectiveness of our instruction and students readiness to learn, so that we can take the necessary steps as to modify or augment our objectives accordingly (see Evaluation below for further discussion of this point).

The presentation phase

This phase consists of two subphases: (See Fig. 1) a prepresentation subphase and an explanation subphase. The prepresentation subphase has to do with laying the grounds ready for the learning of the to-be-learnt objectives. At this phase and before a teacher embarks on teaching the new skill or concept, she/he has to: a) motivate the learners, b) help the learners recall the rules and concepts (prerequisites) that are essential for the learning of the new skill or concept, and d) inform the learners of what they are expected to learn. (These three activities do not have a fixed order for their occurrance.) Depending on the nature of the terminal objective one can start with the motivation of the students or the recalling of the prerequistes for learning the new skill or concepts. As a matter of fact all of these activities enhance the pupils' motivation, perhaps most important of which, in situations where English is learnt as a foreign language, is to relate the objective to be learnt to the pupils own experience, because in such situations pupils are not always aware of the relevance of English to their own lives.

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half of the class to repeat after him again two or three times so as to give them more practice and be able to listen to their pronunciation better. Thirdly, she/he asks small groups of students to repeat after her or him. This time the teacher should prick his or her ears in order to pick out the pupils with faulty pronunciation. Finally, the teacher should ask those pupils with faulty pronounciation to repeat after him or her. The teacher should, whenever that is possible, point out any significant pronunciation features which may help the pupils overcome any difficulties they may have in the production of any particular language form.

How can we teach our pupils to produce the example we have been discussing so far? This example, however, poses a certain difficulty since it is formed of two long parts. We suggest the following procedure because of this.

First, the teacher asks the whole class to repeat each of the two utterances, i.e. the question: 'What would you rather have, a pepsi or a 7up?' and the response: 'I'd rather have a 7up. (As the question is rather long, the teacher can pause after 'have' which marks the first half of the question first and move to the second half only when the pupils were able to produce the first half in an acceptable form).

Secondly, the teacher asks one half of the class to repeat the question and the other half to repeat the response and vice versa. If the pupils still have difficulty in producing the question, the teacher can help them by pausing after 'have'.

Thirdly, the teacher should now ask one group of students to repeat the question after him, and another group to repeat the response. If the class is arranged into groups, there will be no difficulty in conducting this drill, but if the class is seated into rows and not groups, the teacher will have to ask the pupils in each row to repeat after him or her.

Finally, the teacher asks those pupils having difficulty in enunciating the forms to repeat after him. It is here that the teacher may need to point out or even explain any significant pronunciation features. When the repetition drill is conducted in this fashion, it will save us a lot of trouble and time at later stages.

The second type of CLE, which is also useful with this kind of language function, is the chain drill. The teacher may begin the chain by asking one of the brighter pupils: 'What would you rather have, a pepsi or a coke?' The pupil answers and then also asks another pupil, who answers and also asks a third pupil and so forth.

When the teacher is satisfied that the pupils can now enunciate the newly learnt language function fairly accurately, she/he may now take a further step in making the pupils not only produce what they have heard, but manipulate the newly learnt language forms. This takes us into the guided language use sub-phase.

Guided language use.

The main purpose of this phase is to allow the pupils to manipulate the newly acquired language forms by using them to express a given set of ideas. One of the excercises, which is quite helpful in this, is what is known as the substitution table. In this kind of excercise the pupil will have to choose a word or a phrase from a number of columns in order to express an idea. Below we have two substitution tables. (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

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should be intended for detailed study of the conversation. During the second and third listening the tape can be stopped at the end of each utterance and the teacher can ask the pupils questions such as: 'What did Mr Smith offer his guests?' 'What did Mr David choose?' "Did Mr Osman choose lime juice or orange juice?' etc. The pupils should be encouraged to give short answers only at this stage, because the main purpose of this question and answer session, (which should take about ten to twelve minutes) is to make sure that the pupils have listened to and understood the conversation. When the teacher has made sure that most of his/her pupils can follow the conversation, he/she should now begin the practice phase.

The practice phase

It is true that language educators speak of controlled, guided and free language practice or use, but most of them speak of it in terms of the general development of the *SL/FL learner and seldom discuss it in terms of the learner's development in reference to a particular skill, grammatical use or even in the use of certain language functions. Our experience has shown us that when we allow our pupils to progress from controlled language use through guided language use to free language use in the learning of any language function, they stand a better chance of doing away with too much dependence on the teacher and use the newly learnt language function spontaneously in novel situations.

Moreover, this kind of practice allows us to classify the diffrent language excercises into controlled language excercises (CLE), guided language excercises (GLE), and free language excercises (FLE). This not only makes us avoid using a number of excercises which basically have the same function, but it should also stop us from using a GLE before a CLE or even an FLE before a CLE. For example, many teachers are fond of role play and hence often ask their pupils to do a role play rather prematurely, which results in frustration for both the teacher and the pupils.

In addition to these points, it becomes easy to determine certain achievement standards for each of the three levels. This will allow us to a) have continuous evaluation (see Fig. 1), b) group pupils according to the language level they have reached, c) determine the particular needs and weaknesses of particular pupils and consequently, give each individual pupil the particular help that she/he needs.

It will not be possible for us to discuss and classify all the different language excercises. We will try, however, to show how to apply this kind of language practice to our example.

*SL/FL: Second Language
and Foreign Language

Controlled language use

Controlled language use (CLU) is characterized by the production of similar language forms by the same learners in the expression of a certain language function. The main function or purpose of this kind of use is the teaching and learning of acceptable pronunciation (including stress and intonation). The most popular and widely used excercises in this type of practice are repetition and chain drills.

There is a certain routine for the conduct of repetition drills. First, the teacher asks the whole class to repeat the form three or four times after him in order to teach them how to pronounce it. Secondly, the teacher asks one

teacher will then ask two or three of the most daring of his pupils to stand in front of the class, after assigning each one the role she/he is going to play. The teacher will remind the pupils to greet their teacher. Mr. Brown may also use some welcoming expressions and then ask each of his guests his or her likes. The teacher should ask as many students as time allows to do these acts. She/he can also ask the pupils who have not as yet mastered this function to continue with this kind of role play outside the classroom with some of their more able classmates.

In order to safeguard against mechanical repititions the teacher can change the choice of drinks from soft to hot drinks and later, for evaluation puprposes, the teacher can even change the choice to fruits, cookies etc.

Evaluation

Although the evaluation suggested here is a continuous one, it is being discussed at the end for merely organizational reasons. Indeed, the evaluation of the pupils' performance starts from the moment the pupils begin to chorus after the teacher. It is important to point out that the purpose of this evaluation in not to give grades, but to provide immediate feedback and help to the pupils as well as to the teacher himself. For example, when the teacher picks out pupils with unacceptable pronunciation to repeat after him or her yet another time, she/he is acting as both a teacher and an evaluator.

There are two problems that we need to consider in regard to this model. First, it is difficult to evaluate spoken language objectively. Second, it is difficult to have well marked demarcation lines between the three language practice sub-phases. The first of these problems is a general one and is characteristic of productive skills. We believe, however, that the teacher as an expert in his field can use his or her own value judgement in evaluating the performance of his or her pupils. The second of these problems is particular to this model and we will discuss it briefly.

At the controlled language use sub-phase the teacher should concentrate mainly on the pupils abilities to enunciate the sounds of English being learnt. Here the teacher should pay particular attention to the areas which previous experience have shown that the pupils have difficulties with. The teacher should only proceed to the next phase only when a very high proportion of the pupils are able to produce the to-be-learnt language function in an acceptable manner. It is needless to point out that large numbers of pupils who have spent six to eight years learning English as a foreign language are still unable to produce it in any intelligible fashion. This we believe is mainly due to the fact that many teachers do not give this point its due attention.

At the guided language use sub-phase the teacher should continue to concentrate on pronunciation as well on the use of correct grammatical and appropriate social forms. Here the teacher should pay attention to syntactical features such as, word order, inflection and any other syntactical features that the pupils are known to have difficulties with.

At the free language use level the teacher should evaluate the overall abilities of the pupils in producing the newly learnt language functions and notions. Here we have a different kind of problem; that is of validity. To what extent will the teacher's evaluation of his pupils predict their future performance in real life situations. The teacher has little to do here other than the creating of

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What would you rather have,	Mr Johns,	an	lemonade	or karkadi?
	Ahmed	a	pepsi	lime juice?
	Sayed Omer	—	7up	pepsi?
	James		coke	orange juice?
			mango juice	coke?
			orange juice	7up?
			lime juice	mango juice?

Fig. 2

I'd rather have	a	pepsi
	an	7up .
		lime juice
		orange juice
		coke
		mango juice
		lemonade

Fig. 3

There are a number of ways of conducting this excercise, but the procedure which we have found quite effective is a combination of class work, group work and individual work.

First, the teacher asks each group to prepare three or four questions from Fig. 2 and three or four answers from Fig. 3. (This can be done in two or three minutes.)

Second, the teacher should ask one pupil from group A to shoot a question to his counterpart in group B, who will give his answer to that question.

Third, a pupil from group C will ask a pupil from group D. Finally, the teacher can now ask the groups that are responding to ask questions and the groups that are asking questions to respond and so on and so forth.

By now most of the pupils will have internalized the new language functions and notions and are therefore ready for more demanding work.

Free language use

So far the pupils have been engaged into manipulative and to a certain degree mechanical activities. However, our ultimate target is to get the pupils to use this newly acquired skill in actual and novel situations. As it is highly impossible for any teacher to predict how his or her pupils will behave linguistically outside the classroom, she/he will have to create mock situations inside the classroom to obtain an approximate measure of how they will behave outside it. This is where role play can play a significant part.

We suggest that the teacher should explain to his or her pupils what role play is (if they are unfamiliar with it as of yet) and also explain to them the situation they are about to create and the roles they are going to play. If the teacher is imaginative enough, she/he can create a situation where the pupils can also use some of the functions they have previously learnt and which are relevant to the present situation. In our case, for instance, we can ask the pupils to imagine that they are paying a visit to Mr. Brown, their English language teacher, at his home and that they will have to greet him, perhaps also introduce some of their friends, or apologize for being late etc., and that he willl offer them soft drinks and they will have to express their likes. The

make-belief situations inside the classroom. In order to make our evaluation as valid as possible, however, we will need to change the examples and some of the elements of the situation we have been using. As we have mentioned earlier in connection with our example, we can change the things offered as well the guests and the hosts. This will at least safeguard against mere rote learning i.e the pupils will not be mechanically producing some forms that they have committed to memory earlier on without much conscious thought.

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