Language skills learning and teaching : Grammar, Lexis and Pronunciation

1 FUNCTIONS

1.1 Definition

A function is a reason why we communicate. Every time we speak or write, we do so for a purpose (apologising, advising, agreeing, clarifying, disagreeing, expressing obligation, preferences, etc.). Functions are a way of describing language use. When we describe language through functions we emphasise the use of the language and its meaning for the people who are in the context where it is used.

The language we use to express a function is called an exponent. In other words, in a context where a customer doesn't understand what a shop assistant has just said, he is asking for clarification and the exponent will be "Sorry, what do you mean?". An exponent can express several different functions. It all depends on the context it is used in. One exponent can express several different functions because its function depends on the context. One function can also be expressed through different exponents. For example, these exponents: “Call you later?”, “Can I call you later?”, “I would be very pleased if I could call you later” express different levels of formality, that is to say, more or less relaxed ways of saying things. Broadly speaking, formal (serious and careful) exponents are used in formal situations, informal (relaxed) exponents in informal situations and neutral (between formal and informal) exponents in neutral situations. It is important to use the level of formality that suits a situation.

1.2 Teaching procedure

In this syllabus, functions are taught together with the grammar of their main exponents. Combining functions and grammar helps to give grammar a meaning for adult learners and helps them to learn functions with grammatical structures that they can use in other contexts. A functional approach to teaching English helps me find real-world contexts in which to present and practise grammar, and helps learners to see the real-world use of the grammar they learn.

2 GRAMMAR

2.1 Definition

Grammar rules describe the part of the speech (adjectives, determiners, prepositions) and grammatical structures or patterns (the arrangement of words into patterns which have meaning). The rules for grammatical structures use grammatical terms to describe forms and uses. 'Form' refers to the specific grammatical parts that make up the structure and the order they occur in. 'Use' refers to the meaning that the structure is used to express. In the case of the Past continuous tense, the form is 'subject + past tense of verb to be + -ing', and the
use 'to describe a temporary or background situation or action in the past'. Teachers also use grammar to
describe how words are formed like prefixes and suffixes.

2.2 Teaching procedure

Grammar rules describe the way that language works, but language changes over time, so grammar rules are
not fixed. They change too. Unfortunately, grammar rules and grammar book don’t always change as quickly as
the language. For this reason, I keep up to date with what parts of language are changing and how thank to
realia. Just learning grammatical rules and structures doesn’t give learners enough help with learning how to
communicate, which is the main purpose of language. So, much language teaching has moved away from
teaching only grammar, and now teaches functions, language skills and fluency as well as grammar.

3 LEXIS

3.1 Definition

Lexis is individual words or sets of words that have a specific meaning. Vocabulary items have different kinds
of meaning. Firstly, there is the meaning that describes the thing or idea behind the vocabulary item, this is
called denotation. Then there is figurative meaning. There is also the meaning that a vocabulary item has in the
context (situation) in which it is used in the sentence. The meaning of some vocabulary items is created by
adding prefixes or suffixes to base words or by making compound words or by collocation. To help distinguish
the meaning of words from other related words, vocabulary items can be grouped into synonyms and lexical
sets (groups of words that belong to the same topic area). Words sometimes have several denotations. The
context in which we are writing or speaking makes it clear which meaning we are using. Words can also change
their denotations according to what part of speech they are. We can also see that not all words have all the
kinds of forms and that it is not always possible to find synonyms for words, as few words are very similar in
meaning.

3.2 Teaching procedure

Really knowing a word means knowing all its different kinds of meanings. It also involves understanding its
forms, what part of speech it is, how it works grammatically, and how it is pronounced and spelt. Vocabulary
items need to be taught again and again to learners, expanding gradually on their meaning and their forms.
This also increases the chances of learners remembering the item. Vocabulary items are introduced in reading
and listening before we ask learners to use the items.

4 PRONUNCIATION

4.1 Definition

To talk about pronunciation, the mention to phonology is essential. In English these features include
phonemes, word stress and intonation. Those last three are really highlighted in this syllabus. A phoneme is the
smallest unit of sound that has meaning in a language. The phonemes of a language can be represented by
phonemic symbols. In dictionary entries for words other symbols usually accompanies the phonemic script. As
the word stress. This is the part of the word which we say with greater energy, with more length and sound on
its vowel sound. We pronounce the other syllables with less energy, especially the unstressed or weak
syllables, whose vowels get shortened or sometimes even disappear. In English, stress also influences how
sentences and incomplete sentences are pronounced. We say different parts of the sentence with more or less stress, slower and louder, or quicker and more softly. This is called sentence stress. One word in the sentence has main stress. This is the word which the speaker thinks is most important to the meaning of the sentence. Other words in the sentence are unstressed. Sentence stress is a characteristic of connected speech, spoken language in which all the words join to make a connected stream of sounds. Some other characteristics of connected speech are contractions and vowel shortening in unstressed words and syllables. These characteristics help to keep the rhythm (pattern or stress) of speech regular. Intonation is another important part of pronunciation. It is the movement of the level of the voice, the tune of a sentence or a group of words. We use intonation to express emotions and attitudes, to emphasise or make less important particular things we are saying, and to signal to others the function of what we are saying, to show we are starting or stopping speaking or whether we are asking a question or making a statement.

4.2 Teaching procedure

Learners of English in a Post-Compulsory Education Scheme of Work need to be able to understand a wide variety of accents in English, as English becomes more and more a global language. As pronunciation communicates so much of our meaning, producing sounds in a way that can be widely understood is extremely important in language learning. Learner’s pronunciation needs to be clear to speakers from many countries. Moreover, a regular focus in lessons on different aspects of pronunciation helps to make learners aware of its importance.

Bibliografía

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