MODERN STRATEGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract. It is envisaged that these exercises will assist in the development of general strategies in prediction and anticipation that are transferable to the specific fields of study in which the students are engaged. To facilitate this transfer the teacher involved in providing English assistance for students who are nonnative speakers of the language could progressively incorporate into the program tape recordings of actual lectures and seminars and use these as the basis for the activities outlined above; e.g., an audio cassette recording or a videotape of a classroom lecture might be stopped at various points and the students asked to suggest what would come next. In this way the students could be trained to use prediction and anticipation strategies in real-life situations.

Many students have been taught English in highschool with an emphasis on reading and writing. For such students improvement in listening skills is a major priority. When students of our university go abroad to continue their studies or when they attend various courses in English, they face considerable problems when they are required to take down information that is given orally in their lectures and seminars or when they have to express themselves in English. Furthermore, the difficulties that they experience in following the flow of discussions limit their opportunities to make an active contribution in the informal tutorials and small-group activities that are an important part of university study at the advanced level.

Studies of how people process and interpret speech suggest that the key factor in comprehension is the ability to make intelligent guesses as to what will come next. According to Fry (1977:75), “Prediction is one of the most powerful factors in the reception of speech. We should get nowhere at all if we did not know to some extent what to expect.” In similar vein, Rivers (1980: 17) points out that: “In comprehending oral messages … we are not just extracting linguistic information, but we are selecting and matching what we have selected against probable messages that we are anticipating.”

It would seem that effective listeners are those who are able to select relevant information and not be sidetracked by unimportant details. By using anticipation and prediction strategies they are able to work out in advance what the speaker is likely to say, and, as a result, they know which parts of the message they need to concentrate on. For example, if the students were to hear a talk entitled “The State of the Country’s Economy,” they might expect that the speaker would provide various facts and figures to describe the present situation, perhaps make comparisons with other countries, and possibly also make certain suggestions as to future directions. As the talk progressed, the good listeners could make further predictions about what the speaker would say next and than listen carefully to what was actually said in order to confirm or reject predictions. In making these predictions the students would be drawing on their background knowledge of the topic and their experience of how talks on such themes are structured, as well as on their understanding of the language forms that are related to the subject area.
If anticipation and prediction are important in comprehending messages transmitted orally, then clearly, as Brown (1977), McKeating (1981), and Richards (1983) suggest, classroom activities need to be provided to assist students to develop this capacity to guess what will come next.

What kinds of exercises can be used to promote intelligent anticipation and prediction? The activities that follow are divided into two main types: those that focus on prediction at the word or word-group level, and those that relate to prediction at the level of overall organization and development of the messages.

A) Simple prediction of words and word combinations:

1. The teacher reads the beginning of a phrase or a sentence and asks the students to guess how it will end.

   E.g. The full potential of fertilizers for increasing production cannot be done unless sufficient water ____________.

   Irrigation has been extensively practised by the earliest known civilizations, but until recent years it had been regarded ____________.

2. The students have to complete statements in a text that is read aloud to them.

   E.g. Computer assisted instruction:

   Generally, computer assisted learning programs are designed to involve the student, who is required to respond to each step in the lesson before proceeding. Early programs tended only to inform the student whether his answers were right … (or wrong). Later improvements provided the student with an explanation when a wrong answer … (was given). Modern programs can assess the individual student’s performance and adapt the lesson to his … (needs).

3. As a variation to Exercise 2 the students are given graphs or a set of statistics and must predict how the speaker will interpret them.

   BAYLOR UNIVERSITY
   SUMMARY OF ENROLLMENTS BY COLLEGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food technology</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Letters</td>
<td>1148</td>
<td>1217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   Statements:
   Compared with the corresponding figures for 2005 the total enrollment in the different colleges in 2006 showed an increase. The enrollments in Food Technology, however, … (declined). The largest growth in numbers occurred in … (Management). In Science the number of enrollments remained … (almost the same).

4. The students hear a sentence and then try to predict what the next one will be.

   E.g. There are many different kinds of media that keep people in touch with what is going on in the world. ___________________________. If you are planning on going climbing in the mountains, there are certain things that you must do first. __________________________.
B) Prediction at the discourse level
1. The students are given the title of an imaginary talk such as “The Problem of Pollution in Cities” and are then asked to suggest the ways in which this theme is likely to be developed. For example, the students could set the possible lines of development of the theme in the form of a flow chart:

```
Introduction
   ↓
Types of pollution
   ↓
Consequences of pollution
   ↓
Suggestions for future
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2. The teacher reads sections of a mystery story to the students, pausing between each section to ask the students to predict what will come next.

*E.g.*
(a) It could have been a cry or perhaps it was only the wind sighing in the trees around the derelict house. Peter and Tony looked at each other. Should they stop and investigate? But already it was past nine o’clock and quite dark. Their families would be waiting for them.

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What do you think Peter and Tony will decide to do?
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(b) The sound came again; too loud and prolonged to be the wind. “Come on”, said Tony, pushing open the gate. “We’d better see what it is. ‘Cautiously they crept up the steps to the house. On the right there was a window softly reflecting the moonlight’. “Give me a lift”, whispered Tony. “I’ll try to see what’s inside.”

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What will Tony see inside?
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(c) Tony peered through the window. At first it was hard to see anything. Black shadows, cobwebs, a broken chair, a table leaning against the wall … but something was moving … something was crawling slowly across the floor. Tony froze in horror. Could it be a …?

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What is it that frightens Tony?
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3. As a variation to the open/ended question given in the previous exercises the teacher could provide the students with a choice of possibilities at each stage.

*E.g.*, What will Peter and Tony decide to do?
Choose one of the following and say why you think this will happen.

A

They will go on home.

B

They will go into the house by themselves.

4. To focus on how linking words such as *because, however, so, therefore, also, but* introduce a REASON, a RESULT, a QUALIFICATION etc., the teacher reads aloud a statement such as: Tomorrow I hope to go to the beach, but/because/and …

The students suggest likely completions.

- **but + Qualification**
  - it will probably be wet
  - it depends on my work

- **because + Reason**
  - the weather is so hot
  - I like swimming

- **and + Accompanying**
  - the weather is so hot
  - I like swimming

5. The students hear a talk that gives opposing arguments on a topic. They then have to predict whether, in the final summing up, the speaker will take a position *for* or *against* the issue:

_E.g._ Smoking should be banned in all public places.

**SECTION 1**

Smoking has been shown to be dangerous to your health. Medical tests have brought conclusive evidence that smoking is linked with cancer and heart disease. Furthermore, smoking is a hazard not only to the smoker but to nonsmokers who have endure the smoking of others near them.

In addition, cigarette smoke can be irritating to the eyes. Even the smell of cigarette smoke is unpleasant to the nonsmoker. For these reason, many people would strongly urge that smoking should be banned in all public places and that this ban should be vigorously enforced.
SECTION 2

Of course, the smokers claim that such a ban would infringe their basic rights. The argument is that the freedom of people to act in a way that suits them is a very important one. To ban smoking would be a retrograde step, as it would be one further blow to the freedom and liberty of the individual (even though in saying this the smokers appear to show little regard for the rights and freedoms of the nonsmokers who are forced to breathe in their smoke).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will the conclusion be for or against a ban on smoking in public places?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What details in the presentation of the arguments have helped you to predict this outcome?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. The students listen to part of a talk on a topic such as “Farming” and then have to choose an appropriate continuation or conclusion. For example, the subject of “Housing” may be developed in various ways following different organizational patterns:

- **FARMING**
  - **CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER**
    - e.g.
    - In the past …
    - Today …
  - **COMPARING/CONTRASTING ARGUMENTS**
    - e.g.
    - On one hand …
    - On the other hand …

7. As a “reverse prediction” the students could hear an answer and have to work out the preceding question, or be given the conclusion of a talk or a story and have to outline what would lead up to it.
CONCLUSION

It is envisaged that these exercises will assist in the development of general strategies in prediction and anticipation that are transferable to the specific fields of study in which the students are engaged. To facilitate this transfer the teacher involved in providing English assistance for students who are nonnative speakers of the language could progressively incorporate into the program tape recordings of actual lectures and seminars and use these as the basis for the activities outlined above; e.g., an audio cassette recording or a videotape of a classroom lecture might be stopped at various points and the students asked to suggest what would come next. In this way the students could be trained to use prediction and anticipation strategies in real-life situations.

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