



## **A workshop re-introducing the concept of “communicative competence” in language teaching and learning**

In this workshop, student-language teachers have been asked to discuss in pairs what they would teach to a class of beginner language learners and why. The following dialogue is an extract of the interactions led by the teacher after the pairwork activity.

- 1) What devices does the teacher use to keep her students “on-track”?
- 2) Can you find an example where the teacher was a) providing, b) scaffolding and c) problematizing
- 3) What do you feel she applies most? Why do you think she uses this strategy?

Teacher: So Magda and Yousef did you agree on a common object for teaching a class of beginners? Or were there some differences in approach?

Yousef: No, I think we agreed.

Teacher: ok, so tell us about it.

Yousef: Well, if we were teaching absolute beginners then the first lesson would of course be about how to say “my name is ....? “What’s your name?” “Pleased to meet you” etc. Then we would organise the lessons around some very basic and necessary grammatical patterns .... Well, that would be the organising principle and we’d include useful topics and give students lots of speaking practice.

Teacher: Hmm. .... ok you say grammar would be the organising principle except on the first day?

Magda: Yes, maybe even on the first day. Present tense for example.

Saranda: Yeah, or personal pronouns.

Teacher: Ok well let’s put the first day to one side for a minute and let’s look at Magda and Yousef’s main organising principle – basic and necessary grammatical patterns. Why this organising principle?

Yousef: Well, because we need the building blocks as beginners.

Ahmed: Yeah, language has a structure, form.

Teacher: Ok, good. Language has form so when students learn a language they need to study its form.

Saranda: Well, Krashen said no ..... he said that comprehensible input was how students could best acquire the language, not through studying the grammar.

Teacher: You’re absolutely right, Saranda and we’ll come back to that later. For the moment, let us accept that many believe you need to study the grammar of the language to learn it. Ok. (pause). Now, let’s bring back Magda and Yousef’s example of the language focus for the students’ first lesson. “My name is ... “ why this?

Nejwa: Because it’s useful in the real world.

Teacher: The real world?

Nejwa: Yeah .... Umm everyday getting by

Teacher: Ok so language has a social context and ... "getting by?"

Nejwa: Yeah .... I mean "my name is" has a communicative use

Teacher: Good, very good and students need to learn this?

Nejwa: Yes, of course.

Teacher: Ok, so to develop *competence* in a language, many believe you must study its form and communicative use.

Long pause .....

Teacher: "My name is." A good place to start?

Yousef: Of course and it's where most modern coursebooks start.

Teacher: But it's not a given ..... Not like "the sky is blue". I'd like you to question this practice.,,,,

Ahmed: Yeah, and should we teach "my name's" or "my name is"

Teacher: That's a good point, Ahmed- you're talking about the teaching of authentic language or language *in* use. But let's get back to the previous For instance, as a student you go to the target language country. How often do you say, "*my name is*? At the bus stop?

Saranda: ha, ha, never.

Teacher: What do you want to say?

Saranda: Something like, "it's cold today" or "what time's the bus?". And I might not want to say this to certain people ... for instance men my own age. Maybe I want to say it to an old lady or someone. I mean when I'm in Spain I say hello to everybody though but not here. In Spain I say hello to people in lifts, young men whoever. If I don't, it's rude.

Laughter .....

Teacher: So, you see with Saranda's point she will use the language differently in different social contexts, with different people and it depends on the language she is speaking. Now, Canal and Swain wrote a seminal article in 1982 on communicative competence in a language and they separated competence into linguistic competence (ie. The form), sociolinguistic competence ... the social context, .....

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