



Module 2

Building Language Awareness

Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

Video Length: Approximately 11 Minutes
Notes to the Trainer

For best results, have participants go through the readings for this module prior to viewing the video. As you work through this module, try to use pairs and group work whenever that might be effective. After each group activity, debrief the answers and use them for further discussion. Refer back to the main points when appropriate. It is important that teachers apply the concepts in the module to their own classrooms and situations. Module 01 in this series focused on the contextual aspect of language input. Module 02 focuses on the details of the language within that context. Both are important for effective and efficient learning.

See Appendix A for additional handouts that can be used for general observation and discussion tasks with any of the modules.

Before Viewing

Work as a whole class or in pairs or groups. This activity is an example of using “meta-language” to talk about language. It is adapted from Doug Mills’s *Grammar Safari* web site. Retrieved December 09, 2005 from http://www.iei.uiuc.edu/student_grammarsafari.html.

Language Safari activity: Identify a short, interesting text from the news or another source. Give participants a list of 2-3 vocabulary items from the text (whenever possible, choose items that could have more than one meaning or use). Have participants write or explain the meaning of the items *before you give them the text*.

Then have participants read the text. As they read, ask them to search for and focus on the vocabulary items that you identified. Participants then answer the following questions.

1. Do your first definitions match the way the language was used in the text? What was the same? What was different or new?
2. Give a 1-2 sentence summary of the text (main idea). To what extent did the overall context and content give you “clues” about the focus words?

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Debrief

Now, step back from this language focus and analysis activity.

3. How important was it to understand the meaning and use of the focus language items before you read the text? To what extent did the grammatical structures in the text give you “clues” as you read?
4. When you talked about the focus words, what “meta-language” did you use (language that describes the use of language or language patterns; e.g., terms such as *verb*, *gerund*, *compound noun*, *present* or *past tense*)?
5. What other language support resources might be useful in an activity like this one?

Sample Text

Following is an example set of vocabulary items and a corresponding text. Note that the vocabulary items can occur as more than one part of speech in the text (verb, noun, etc.) or as part of a phrasal verb or idiom.

Vocabulary: **run** (4 items), **STOP** (3 items), **coast** (2 items).

Text: *Car thief runs out of gas*. Adapted from the Associated Press article by the same name. Retrieved December 09, 2005 from the <<http://www.wfaa.com/sharedcontent/dws/fea/breakroom/offbeat/stories/121005dnnatoffbeat3.fe15770.html>> web site.

Searcy, Arkansas (USA) — Daniel Townsend apparently had plenty of engine to **outrun** law officers, but he didn't have enough gas.

Townsend, 27, of Augusta, allegedly sped away Wednesday from a sheriff's deputy who tried to pull him over. Authorities say he was driving a stolen Lexus recklessly on U.S. Highway 67/167 north of Searcy, away from the **coast**.

The chase went through city streets in Searcy during morning traffic. Townsend reached speeds of about 100 mph. Sheriff's Captain Clayton Edwards said Townsend darted through traffic, **ran** red lights and sped down the wrong side of the road shortly after 7 a.m.

County Sheriff Pat Garrett said Townsend made it through the city and returned to the highway. Shortly after, the engine on the police car STOPPED **running** and Townsend continued onward. But Townsend, spotted by other law officers, STOPPED about 23 miles later, when he **ran out of** gas and **coasted** to a STOP.

Extension Ideas

Follow the procedure above, using instead a video or audio segment that has clear dialogue or narration (e.g. radio, television, videotape). It may be necessary to run the video segment or audio tract several times.

Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

Preview Vocabulary

Terms	Definitions
Appropriate language	Language that is both linguistically correct and that is proper for the situation.
Authentic sources	Sources used by native speakers or other users of the target language for "real world" communication.
Collaborative learning	Learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. Learning occurs through social activity.
Comprehensible input	Language which can be generally understood by the learner but which contains linguistic items or grammatical patterns that are slightly above the learner's competence.
Conscious effort	Effort that learners make deliberately, knowing and understanding the purpose for the action.
Deductive techniques	Learners are taught the "rules" of language and then expected to apply them.
Inductive techniques	Learners discover the "rules" of language themselves through their experience with the language.
Language awareness	A focus on aspects of language within a given context. Paying attention to or noticing the language detail in a context.
Meta-language	Language used by the teacher and students to talk about language or about learning strategies and techniques.
Pragmatics	Social and cultural aspects of language use.
Reflection	Thinking critically and analytically about language and learning.
Skit	Short dramatic performance.

Now start the video. Listen to the introduction. Complete the guided observation and reflection tasks for each of the video segments. The next part of the manual is for trainees and is available on separate pages for ease of copying.

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Introduction, Expanded Narrative

Module 01 in this series focused on the contextual aspect of language input. Module 02 focuses on the details of the language within that context. Both are important for effective and efficient learning. Communicative language learning tends to focus on a holistic, top-down approach to language learning. The focus is more on function, or the use of language in given situations, than it is on form, the linguistic details of language. However, teachers using a communicative approach have discovered that it is also important to focus on language form: on grammar, on vocabulary, on pronunciation, etc. The question has been about how to do this most effectively, without going back to relying only on rules, exercises, rote memory, and drills.

Building language awareness within a given context appears to be one answer to this question. Research has shown that selectively focusing on aspects of language use within a given context can be an effective teaching and learning practice. Language awareness, then, is more than a focus on form. It also includes the use of that form in context, which is called the pragmatic use of language.

Some characteristics of language awareness:

- The use of meta-language to talk about language, its use, and its forms.
- The training of learners to become better, more conscious participants in their own learning as they do the work of analyzing and reflecting on language and its use.
- A balance of inductive and deductive techniques to focus on specific aspects of language.
- Focus on appropriateness of language used, both situational and cultural.
- The use of comprehensible input in the form of materials from authentic sources.
- The use of language that students are more likely to encounter and use.

Module Focus

In this module, we will be focusing on techniques for helping learners become aware of language forms as they practice language in context. At the beginning of the lesson you will see a primary school class doing a skit called *Across the Wide, Dark Sea*. It is about the pilgrims who, in 1621, were one of the first groups of people to sail across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. Their ship was called *The Mayflower*, and they had a stormy crossing.

Video Segment #1, Classroom Techniques: Observation Guide [Read before viewing.]

Background: In their preparation for the skit, the children learned about the pilgrims' journey across the ocean, why the pilgrims left their country, how they felt about leaving, and the things they had to do to survive in the new country. Many of the children in this class are immigrants in a new country.

1. Look for and list three techniques the teacher and her aides used in the skit and the question-answer activity to focus on vocabulary, give students language cues for answers, and help them use previous information to answer questions about their own situations.
2. The third activity was done in groups. Notice what the task was and how the groups got the language information they needed to do the task.
3. Also look for the type of authentic materials the groups used to do their task and how they used them.

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Reflection

[Read and answer after viewing.]

1. Compare your list with one or more discussion partners. What language teaching techniques did you observe? How are they similar to or different from your own? In what ways do you focus on language specifics in your class(es)?
2. What was the task in the third activity? What were the parts to the task? How did the students get the language information they needed in order to do the task?
3. What was the authentic material the groups used as a stimulus for their activity? Do you think the students had the language skills to get information from this material? What authentic material might you use in your class if you wanted to do this activity?
4. Discuss your reaction to the skit and the related activities. What role did culture play? Content? Context? Has the class you watched given you any ideas for your own class? If so, what?

Module 02 Summary Discussion

1. Review the lists and ideas from the questions above. In your group, try to list your ideas for:
 - Integrated skills activities, such as the skit.
 - What cultural aspects of a target culture might be interesting for your students.
 - How to teach those aspects.
 - Focusing on language within an integrated context.
2. In your group, discuss how you might adapt the ideas from this class to older or adult learners. What context might you use? How would you focus on language within that context?
3. Do you agree with the assumption made in these first two modules, that students can learn more easily and effectively through contextualized language practice and a focus on language within the context? Why or why not? Think particularly of your own students when you answer.
4. After viewing this module, do you think you will try some of these techniques and similar activities in your class? Why or why not? If yes, which ones do you think might be most successful in your situation?

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Now You Try It—An Action Plan

Step 1

You can read some of the articles on the topic of contextualizing language (see Module 2 with its List of Additional Readings and Resources in *Shaping the Way We Teach English: Readings and Resources*). Using the video, you have seen a few examples and ideas from other teachers' classes. Now, think about your own classes, what might be interesting to them, and what language they need to learn. Then answer these questions:

- What topic and teaching could you use?
- How would you contextualize the language?
- What materials would you use that would be generally comprehensible, show language in an authentic context so students could analyze it in that context, and that would include language students would be likely to use?

Step 2

By yourself or with a peer, design a general outline of a one-hour lesson in which the teaching points are contextualized. For your outline, consider the following:

- What would be the activities? (It is not necessary to list all the steps for each activity.)
- Where you would use meta-language? For what purpose?
- Where you would teach something deductively and where you would let the students figure it out inductively?
- Where and how would you have students look at the language in context and think about its meaning or how it is used?

Step 3

Share your outline with others in your group. Explain what the lessons before and after this hour might be about. Get ideas and feedback from the group.

Step 4

Rewrite your outline. Try to fill it out with smaller more detailed steps for each activity. Try it with your class. Share your results with others, as applicable. If you are not teaching, ask the trainer or another experienced teacher for feedback.

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Answer Key to Module 2, Building Language Awareness Answer Key to Reflection Questions

Module 2, Video Segment #1, Classroom Techniques

Here are some suggested directions for answers to the questions for this module. Actual answers may vary depending on local context and the kinds of experience that viewers bring to the task of interpreting and applying video and text concepts.

1. During the skit, the teacher repeats two vocabulary words: “cold,” which is a common word, and connects it with “shivering,” which is a less frequently used word. Using the two words together, repeating them several times, and making motions or movements to demonstrate or act out the meaning helps learners focus and gives them the meaning of “shivering.” This is one example of an effective language focus technique.

During the question-and-answer activity, the teacher’s aide asked questions that referred, either directly or indirectly, to what the children had learned about the experience of the pilgrims. She asked students to think about their own experiences in going to a new place. Because many of the children are immigrants, this is a meaningful activity for them. It connects their real-life experiences with historical events, and helps frame the activity that follows.

In addition, because of the previous context, the children had the language they needed to answer the questions.

The teacher’s aide’s questions were:

Q: Have you ever had to leave your home or country?

Q: What were your reasons for leaving your home and going to a new country?

Q: How did the pilgrims feel about leaving their friends and going to a new country? Has anyone ever lived in one place and had to move to another? How did you feel?

Q: When the pilgrims arrived on land, what activities, chores, or jobs do you think they had to organize to get everything done?

Finally, the teacher and the other aide held up on yellow sheets the target language from the questions, which helped the children understand the questions so they could answer correctly. These were the words on the sheets:

“How did you feel?”

“Alike or different?”

“Activities, chores.”

2. The task in the third activity was to plan a trip. The students worked in groups. Each group created a poster to help them explain their trip. They first decided on a destination and then filled out a green sheet with the following information:

- Place (nouns that describe where they were going).
- Packing list (nouns that describe what they were taking in their suitcase).
- Trip activities (verbs and phrases that describe what they planned to do when they got there).
- Length of time (how long they would be traveling).
- Transportation (how they were going to travel; e.g., by airplane, by train, etc.).

This information served as a language guide for students’ discussion and writing. Students then used this information to create their posters.

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Some of the language support information was posted on the blackboard or the walls. Some of it came from the teacher or her aides. In some cases, students helped each other. The teachers helped students individually with the writing on their posters, particularly spelling and forming the letters. The teachers sometimes gave them vocabulary that they didn't know.

3. The authentic materials used were travel brochures with lots of pictures. The children used them to decide on a place to go, what clothes to take, and to plan their activities. Travel brochures are good for this kind of activity because they can be used for learners with different proficiency levels. Some students could read some of the information in the brochures; some with lower reading ability could still get enough information for the task just by using the pictures.

Answer Guide for Summary Questions

Answers will vary widely for items 1, 3, and 4, depending on teachers' classes and experiences.

2. This unit is one that can easily be adapted for older students. The topic can be either culture (the role and history of Thanksgiving in American culture), travel, or another topic altogether. In a travel unit, a historical event can be a way of linking past, present, and future experiences. Older students might take the roles of actual pilgrims. They could start in England and talk about whether they wanted to make the trip, advantages, and problems. They could problem-solve and role-play various aspects of the voyage and the immigration process.

They could also plan a trip in groups, using brochures, other tourist information, or information from the Internet. A homework assignment could be for them to gather information about a certain place and bring it to class. They could also make posters that they could use later to present their trip plan to the group.