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## **PROMOTING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE USE IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM BY ADAPTING MATERIALS**

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Within the scope of present-day ELT methodology, which follows the basic principles of Communicative Language Teaching, it is generally acknowledged that learning English as a foreign language should take place through communication. Hence one of the major concerns for teachers is to be able to create conditions for communication in the classroom. This task is much easier to cope with when the teacher has at their disposal a course book that provides enough opportunities for communicative language use. Still, even if the course book does not seem communicative enough, one can employ a number of ways to make it more so. The **aim** of this article is to explore these ways and try them out on materials used at Ukrainian schools. It should be pointed out that our research will be confined to grammar practice, which is particularly challenging in terms of facilitating communication in view of a strong focus on forms.

When considering materials in terms of their communicative nature, one should be aware of the fact that the distinction between ‘non-communicative’ and ‘communicative’ allows of more than these two categories. W. Littlewood presented the opposition between ‘non-communicative’ and ‘communicative’ as a continuum from focus on forms to focus on meaning where he defined five categories: *non-communicative learning* (focusing on language structures, their form and meaning) → *pre-communicative language practice* (practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages) → *communicative language practice* (practising pre-taught language and communicating new information) → *structured communication* (using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language, but with some unpredictability) → *authentic communication* (using

language to communicate in situations where the meanings and language forms are unpredictable). To sum it up, the five categories range from strong focus on discrete forms through language practice, which maintains focus on forms but requires attention to meaning and allows communicating new information, to clear focus on conveying meanings. It should be noted that W. Littlewood does not view these 5 categories as a fixed scale – it being a continuum, the categories ‘shade into each other’ and there could be distinguished fewer or more categories [1, p. 322-323].

The above-described continuum can be used to analyse materials and to make them more communicative. As has already been mentioned, the materials to be considered in this article deal with grammar practice. Below is a series of exercises on the Past Continuous that constitute a grammar section in ‘English (Year 8)’ by Oksana Karpyuk [2, p.84-87]:

**1. Read paying attention to the words in bold.**

*Mother:* What **was** the teacher **doing** while you **were exchanging** text messages with your friend? – *Jill:* She **was reading** something. She didn’t see us.

- 1) While Jill **was exchanging** text messages with her friend yesterday, the other girls **were giggling**.
- 2) At the same time, some boys **were playing** with their mobile phones under their desks and some **were doing** their maths homework. ...

**2. Write these verbs in the Past Continuous form.**

- 1) (we) shop – We were shopping.
- 2) (I) play – ...

**3. Change these sentences from the Past Simple Tense to the Past Continuous Tense.**

- 1) They played yesterday.
- 2) We shopped all day. ...

**4. Complete with was or were.**

It *was* Sunday yesterday. All afternoon ...  
... Harry ... helping his friend with his homework.  
... Harry’s brothers ... playing football in the garden.  
... his mother ... reading a book. ...

**5. Complete with the Past Continuous of the verbs in brackets.**

Around 9 pm last Saturday ...  
... Jill’s dad ... (study) some brochures about computers.  
... Jill’s cousin ... (write) a book report.  
... Jill’s grandparents ... (fly) to Paris. ...

**6. Make sentences with while.**

Last night

- a) While / Harry / do his homework / his brother / watch TV
- b) While / Bob / brush his teeth / his father / listen to music
- c) While / Mary / read a book / her friends / walk around the shopping centre ...

According to W. Littlewood’s continuum, the above-described extract makes for non-communicative learning. The strong focus on forms is obvious from the way

the instructions are formulated. Even though in Exercises 1, 4, 5 the sentences are somewhat connected as they outline a situation in the classroom (Ex. 1) or in Harry's or Jill's families (Ex. 4, 5) at a certain period of time, learners are not likely to pay any attention to the meaning of these sentences. When doing Ex. 1, students will just mechanically scan the sentences focusing on the Past Continuous forms in bold. As for Ex. 4 and 5, it will be enough to look at the subject of the sentences to use the correct verb form, so learners may not even bother to read to the end.

In order to make this extract more communicative, one can employ one or more of the techniques suggested below:

- *engaging learners on a personal level (personalization)* – getting learners to talk about themselves is an easy way to make grammar practice meaningful as there will take place an obvious information exchange. What's more, personalization increases learners' motivation as one's life seems to most people a really fascinating topic for discussion;
- *creating information/opinion gaps* – as is well known, communication in real life occurs only when there is a need to share either information or opinions, so creating such a need in the classroom is essential in terms of making language use more communicative;
- *creating communicative situations* – situations resembling those in real life provide meaningful context (the circumstances, the relationship between the participants) and a purpose for communication;
- *offering opportunities for collaborative learning (pair work or group work)* – working in pairs and groups makes it natural for learners to communicate with each other;
- *using authentic (adapted authentic) texts and visuals* – bringing authentic materials, e.g. newspapers, videos, maps, advertisements,

etc. into the classroom helps facilitate meaningful communication and bridges the gap between classroom instruction and real life;

- *providing opportunities for skills integration* – real-life communication usually involves a combination of language skills, e.g. a conversation presupposes speaking and listening, reading an e-mail is often accompanied by writing a reply, etc. Similarly, language use in the classroom should not be confined to one skill at a time.

Let us see how these techniques can be applied when working with the above-mentioned extract.

The presentation of the Past Continuous (Ex. 1) could be made more *personal* both for the teacher and students, which would mean *creating an information gap*. The teacher could start by telling the students that he/she feels a little bit tired as they had a late night yesterday. He/she explains why, e.g. *I was watching a gripping thriller till early in the morning. / I was helping my son/daughter with their homework. / I was checking and marking students' papers. / etc.* Then the teacher asks the students if they had an early or late night and says that he/she will try to guess what the students were doing at 10 p.m., e.g. *You were browsing the Net. / You were chatting with your friends. / You were looking at your friends' photos in VK. / You were doing your homework. / You were having supper. / etc.* The students respond by raising their hands when the teacher guesses correctly. To draw the students' attention to the form, the teacher sums up the guessing game by writing some sentences on the board (e.g. *At 10 p.m. yesterday Mary and Julia were working on their history project. / etc.*) and commenting on the uses of the Past Continuous and the way it is formed.

To organize communicative language practice (as an alternative to Ex. 4, 5), the teacher could split the students into *pairs* and have them tell each other what their family members were doing at the time in question. Then the students could be asked to comment on the similarities and differences.

To facilitate structured communication (as an alternative to Ex. 6), the students could be invited to share personal experiences. The teacher splits the students into

*groups* of four and gives them a minute to look through the photos they have in their mobile phones and choose one they would like to show their group mates. The students take turns to describe their photos in detail – they can comment on the weather, the place, on what was going on, what the other people in the picture were doing, etc. Then each mini-group choose the funniest/most vivid/most memorable experience they have heard and tell the class.

As a follow-up, and in order to involve more *language skills*, the students could be asked to make a post under the title ‘One Moment in Time’ to share with their group on one of social networking sites. They are to post a photo and comment on what made that moment special, what exactly was happening, how they were feeling, etc. The students should be encouraged to read each other’s posts and make their own comments.

Sharing personal experiences strongly resembles a real-life *situation* and so makes language use meaningful and natural. The relation to daily life is fostered by the use of students’ photos, which can be considered *authentic materials*, and social networking services.

It should be pointed out that when employing the suggested ways of making materials communicative one can modify the existing exercises or activities, replace them or add new ones. It does not follow, however, that one should try and make all the materials communicative – there is undoubtedly room for non-communicative learning and pre-communicative language practice in the English classroom.

#### References:

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