

Oral work



General comments

Limitations

Speaking is perhaps the most demanding skill for the teacher to teach. In their own language children are able to express emotions, communicate intentions and reactions, explore the language and make fun of it, so they expect to be able to do the same in English. Part of the magic of teaching young children a foreign language is their unspoken assumption that the foreign language is just another way of expressing what they want to express, but there are limitations because of their lack of actual language.

We don't know what they want to say

If you want your pupils to continue thinking about English simply as a means of communication, then you cannot expect to be able to predict what language the children will use. Their choice is infinite, and we cannot decide what they will say or want to say. You'll also find that the children will often naturally insert their native language when they can't find the words in English.

Finding the balance

What is important with beginners is finding the balance between providing language through controlled and guided activities and at the same time letting them enjoy natural talk. Most of our pupils have little opportunity to practise speaking English outside the classroom and so need lots of practice when they are in class.

Correction

When the pupils are working with controlled and guided activities, we want them to produce correct language. If they make mistakes at this stage then they should be corrected at once. During this type of activity the pupils are using teacher or

textbook language, and the pupils are only imitating or giving an alternative, so correction is straightforward.

However, when pupils are working on free oral activities we are trying to get them to say what they want to say, to express themselves and their own personalities. The language framework of the activity is often quite tightly controlled by the teacher or the textbook, but the emphasis for the pupils should be on content. If pupils are doing problem solving or working on any of the activities of the types given on pages 42 to 48, then correction of language mistakes should not be done while the activity is going on. The teacher can note what he or she thinks should be corrected and take it up in class later. Of course, if pupils ask you what is correct or what the English word for 'X' is while they are talking, then you should give them the answer.

Presenting new language orally

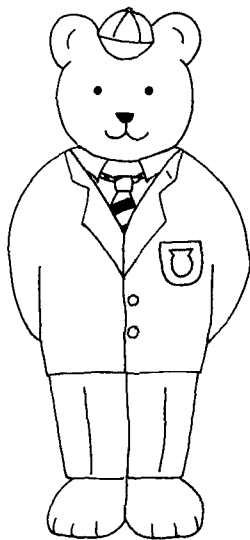
When children start learning English, they obviously need to be given language before they can produce it themselves. Language has to go in before it can come out. At this initial stage the activities will be under the control of the teacher. Here are just some of the ways you can present new language orally:

Through the pupils

The teacher knows what his or her pupils can do, so he or she says: 'Listen to me, please. Maria can swim. Peter can sing. Miriam can ride a bike. Paula can whistle. Carlos can draw.' The sentences should be true and accompanied by the appropriate actions and sounds.

Using a mascot

One of the most successful ways of presenting language to young children is through puppets or a class mascot. Having 'someone' familiar constantly on hand with whom you can have conversations about anything and everything is a wonderful way of introducing new subjects and new language to young children. For example, if you use a teddy as your mascot, you can use Teddy to ask questions. Pupils can ask through Teddy: 'Teddy wants to know . . .' You can present dialogues with Teddy as your partner.



For example:

'Teddy, can you swim?
No I can't, but I can sing.'
And Teddy then sings a song.

OR

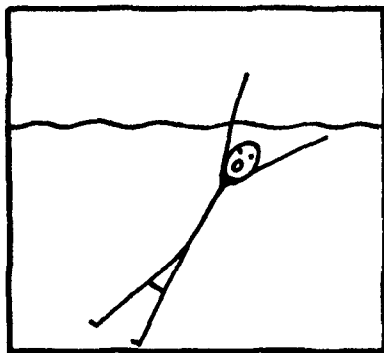
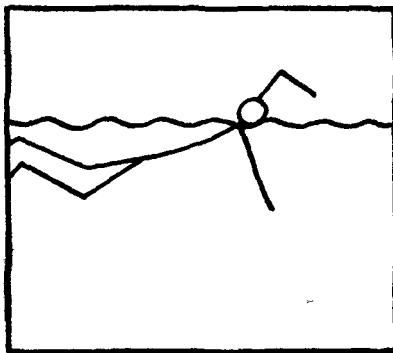
'Teddy, do you like carrots?
Ugh, no!
What about bananas?
Yes I love them.'

Once the teacher has given the model, pupils can ask Teddy all sorts of questions and Teddy can provide all sorts of answers. In this way Teddy's name, address, identity, likes, dislikes, etc. will be built up in cooperation with the children, so that Teddy belongs to everyone in the class. Note that a mascot should belong to only one class. (See page 108 for other suggestions for a class mascot.)

Teddy means that you don't have to present oral work by yourself. Most oral work is directed towards someone and asks for a response from someone, and having another speaker of English around can make all sorts of situations easier to get across.

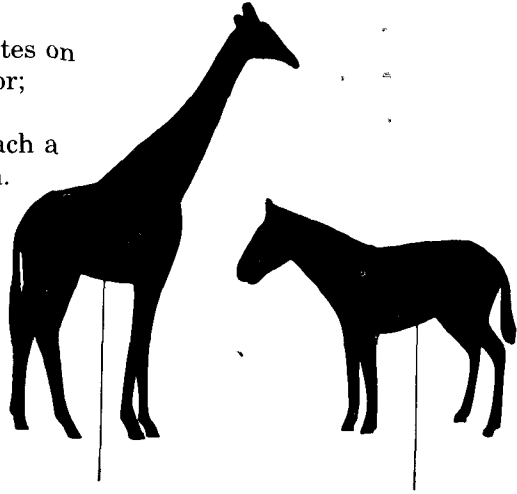
Drawings

You can use very simple line drawings on the board, like these from Andrew Wright's book *Visual Materials for the Language Teacher* (Longman 1976):



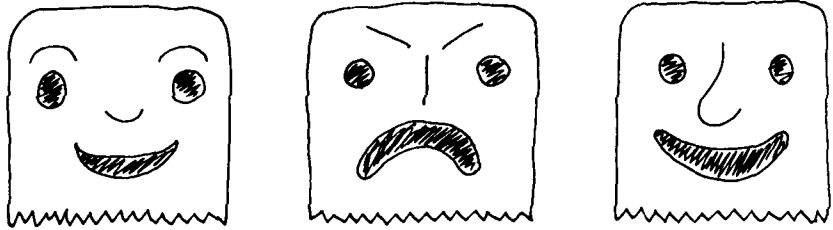
Silhouettes

You can use silhouettes on the overhead projector; they can be given movement if you attach a piece of wire to them. (another of Andrew Wright's ideas):



Puppets

Puppets don't need to be more than masks, and these don't have to be complicated. They can just be paper bags with holes for eyes:



Other suggestions

You can use simple and clear pictures to present new language; you can mime/act situations; you can use realia – clothes, telephones, animals, toy furniture, etc. What else could you use to present language orally?

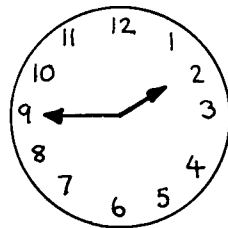
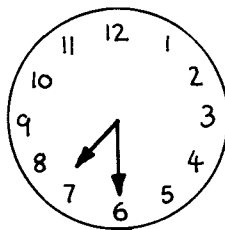
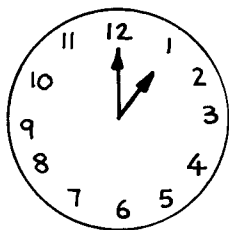
Controlled practice

Controlled practice goes hand in hand with presentation since it is important that pupils try out new language as soon as they have heard it. In controlled practice there is very little chance that the pupils can make a mistake. In the Teddy example above, we have already suggested the controlled practice – that the pupils ask Teddy, ‘Do you like?’ They can then go on to ask each other in pairs, ‘Do you like?’, with the other pupil simply answering ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Once the pattern is established with the class, they can happily do it in pairs. Again too, you can use the same variety of ways of getting the controlled practice going – Teddy, puppets, drawings, etc.

Here are two examples of controlled practice:

Telling the time

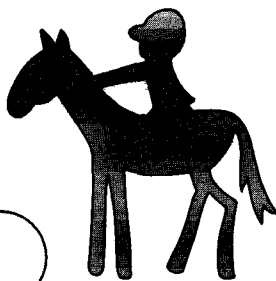
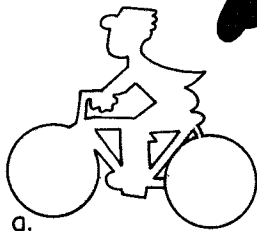
Pupil A asks: What’s the time? Pupil B answers: It’s



One o'clock Half past seven A quarter to two

What’s he/she doing?

Pupil A asks: What’s he/she doing? Pupil B answers: He’s/she’sing.



Activities like these provide the basis for oral work, but do not always produce 'real' language at once. Their purpose is to train pupils to use correct, simple, useful language within a situation or context. Pupils may have to repeat sentences, be corrected and go through the same thing several times. Familiarity and safety are necessary to help build up security in the language.

Guided practice

Guided practice follows on directly from controlled practice and will often be done either in pairs or in small groups. Guided practice usually gives the pupils some sort of choice, but the choice of language is limited. Textbooks are full of exercises for guided practice and you can use pictures or objects or miming to help the pupils understand the content and practise the words – telling the time, asking the way, talking about colours, etc. Here are a couple of such situations:

What's the time?

This exercise would follow on from the controlled practice above. Both pupils have clocks with hands that move. The situation could be that Pupil A's watch has stopped and he or she wants to ask Pupil B the time. This puts the language into context and the guided practice can become a mini-dialogue.

Pupil A : What's the time, please?

Pupil B : It's five past ten. (Looking at the clock in the book and putting his or her clock to five past ten)

Pupil A : Thank you. (Puts his or her clock to the same time and compares)

The language remains the same, but Pupil A never knows what the time is going to be. Since Pupil A has to do something with the information he or she gets, it also makes the exercise just a bit more meaningful.

Chain work

Chain work uses picture cards or word cards. Put all the cards face down in a pile. Pupil 1 picks up a card on which there are some bananas. Turning to Pupil 2 he or she says 'Do you like bananas?' Pupil 2 then picks up the next card on which there are some apples and answers, 'No, I don't like bananas, but I like apples.' Pupil 2 turns to Pupil 3 and says, 'Do you like apples?' to which Pupil 3 replies, 'No, I don't like apples, but I like. . . .' and so on. Obviously, this activity can be used to

practise whatever vocabulary or structure you are working on at the time – it is not limited to bananas and apples.

Dialogues and role play work

Working with dialogues is a useful way to bridge the gap between guided practice and freer activities. Controlled dialogues can easily develop into freer work when the pupils are ready for it. Putting pupils into pairs for doing the dialogues is a simple way of organising even large classes.

First the teacher will have to present the dialogue in whatever way seems most suitable. You might like to use puppets, or Teddy, or a magnet board or a flannel board – it really depends on what you have available. Dialogues which involve some sort of action or movement are the ones which work best with young children. Intonation is terribly important too, and children love to play around with this. After the pupils have heard the dialogue a couple of times, and you've done it with some individuals, with you 'giving' them their parts, let them all repeat it with you, making sure that it doesn't become a chant. Then let half the class do it with the other half of the class and then let the pupils do it in twos.

Using objects

Here are two dialogues which show how physical movements or objects can make a dialogue come alive for young children, and give it an amusing communicative purpose. The day before, ask the children to have something unusual in their pockets the next day. During a quiet time, make sure that each one knows what the word for his or her object is in English.

The children can choose which dialogue they want to follow, and they can go through one or both with as many other pupils as you have time for.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What have you got in your pocket? - I'm not telling you. - Oh, please? - O.K. It's a frog. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What have you got in your pocket? - I'm not telling you. - Then don't!
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Clearly, there is a lot more involved in these exchanges than language alone, and you may find that you want to act them

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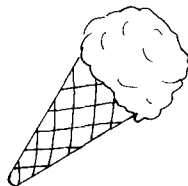
out in the mother tongue first. There are also endless ways in which these dialogues could develop, and young children will very quickly go outside the limits of what is set for them. This type of activity works well with the five to seven year olds as well as the older children.

Role play

Another way of presenting dialogues is through role play. In role play the pupils are pretending to be someone else like the teacher, or a shop assistant, or one of their parents, etc. For young children you should go from the structured to the more open type of activity.

- 1 Beginners of all ages can start on role play dialogues by learning a simple one off by heart and then acting it out in pairs. With the five to seven year olds you can give them a model first by acting out the dialogue with Teddy, and getting the pupils to repeat the sentences after you. With the older children you can act it out with one of the cleverer pupils.

A: Good morning. Can I help you?
B: Yes, please. I'd like an ice cream.
A: Here you are.
B: How much is that?
A: 45p. Thank you.
B: Goodbye.
A: Goodbye.



- 2 The next stage can be to practise the above dialogue, but asking for different things. Your class now knows the dialogue, and together you can suggest other things to ask for – a bar of chocolate, a bottle of lemonade, a packet of crisps. The prices will, of course, have to be changed too. If you are introducing ‘a bar of, a bottle of, a bag of’ for the first time, you might want to put the suggestions on the board, but otherwise you don’t need to. Make it clear that when they are working on their own in pairs, they can ask for things which have not been mentioned, and they can add comments if they want to.
- 3 In real role play, the language used comes from the pupils themselves, so your pupils will have to be familiar with the

language needed before you can do the role play itself with them. This type of role play is more suitable for the eight to ten year olds at level two. The roles which the children play can be given to them orally, but if the children can read, then it is easier to give them written cue cards:

Customer

You go into a kiosk to buy something for Saturday evening. Here are some of the things you can ask for:
 a bar of chocolate
 a packet of crisps
 a bottle of lemonade

Remember to be polite.

Shop assistant

You work in kiosk. A customer comes in. Here are the prices of some of the things you sell:

a bar of chocolate 50p
 a packet of crisps 40p
 a bottle of lemonade 60p

Remember to be polite.
 You start the conversation.

Again, those who want to can keep to the information given. Others might want to move into a freer activity and have a completely different conversation. Most pupils like to add a bit extra to rather matter-of-fact situations like this, and we have had customers grumbling about prices, the shop assistant trying to sell crisps that are old, lemonade which is the wrong colour, etc.

Dialogues and role play are useful oral activities because:

- 1 Pupils speak in the first and second person. Texts are often in the third person.
- 2 Pupils learn to ask as well as answer.
- 3 They learn to use short complete bits of language and to respond appropriately.
- 4 They don't just use words, but also all the other parts of speaking a language – tone of voice, stress, intonation, facial expressions, etc.
- 5 They can be used to encourage natural 'chat' in the classroom, making up dialogues about the little things which have happened and which occupy the children at that moment. At first these conversations will be a bit one-sided, perhaps taking place between the teacher and Teddy in the very beginning. But if the atmosphere in the classroom is relaxed and nobody worries too much about formal mistakes

or using the mother tongue now and then, then even beginners can have great fun trying out the little language they know. There is a very narrow dividing line between guided activities about things which you want to talk about and actually talking about them.

Free activities

Using controlled and guided activities which have choices wherever possible provides a good background for activities where children say what they want to say. Let's look first at some characteristics of free activities.

- They focus attention on the message/content and not on the language as such, although the language will usually be limited by the activity itself.
- There is genuine communication even though the situations are sometimes artificial. In a way, everything we do in the classroom is artificial – we do it to prepare pupils for their lives outside the classroom. But free activities are one step nearer real life – and they let us know that we can communicate in the foreign language.
- Free activities will really show that pupils can or cannot use the language – this is something which you cannot be sure of if you only do guided activities.
- Free activities concentrate on meaning more than on correctness. Formal mistakes don't really matter too much unless it means your pupils can't be understood, so, as we said in Chapter 1, leave correction until afterwards. In free activities we're trying to get the pupils to use the language with a natural flow – with what is called *fluency* – and so fluency is more important than *accuracy* at this stage.
- Teacher control is minimal during the activity, but the teacher must be sure that the pupils have enough language to do the task.
- The atmosphere should be informal and non-competitive. All pupils 'win'.
- There is often a game element in the activity.

The range of free activities is endless and goes from playing card games to giving mini-talks or presenting personal or school news in English to working out what your partner had for breakfast. We have chosen to look at just a few of these activities which we know work well in classes of young children.

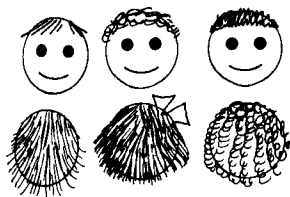
Suggestions for
mini-talks:

My room
My favourite meal
My pet
A good day
Saturday at home
My family
Pocket money

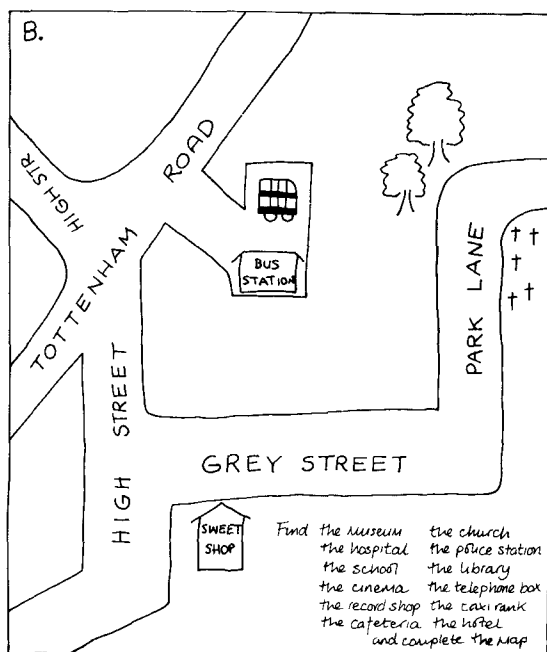
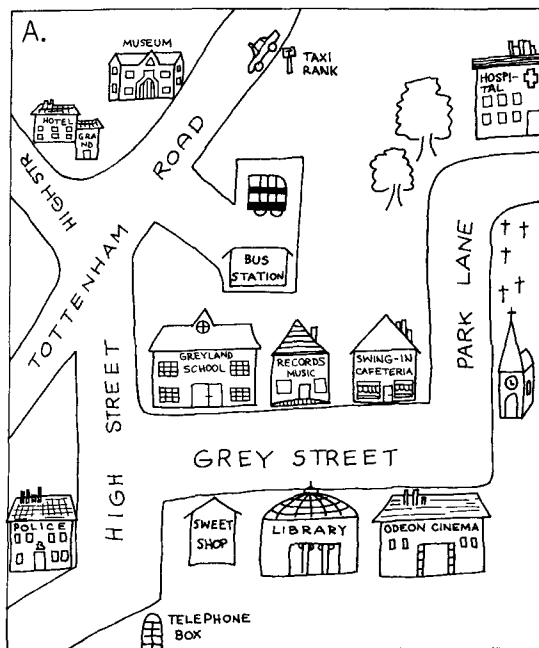
Most of them are based on the information gap principle – that A knows something B doesn't know, and B wants that information.

Pairwork

First let's look at some pairwork activities. Remember that quite a lot of pairwork activities can be done very simply in class by making half the class turn their backs to the teacher/overhead projector/blackboard, and making sure that all the pupils who have their backs to you have partners who are facing you. In that way, you can give information to the half of the class facing you, and they then have to pass it on to those who cannot see the teacher/overhead projector/blackboard.

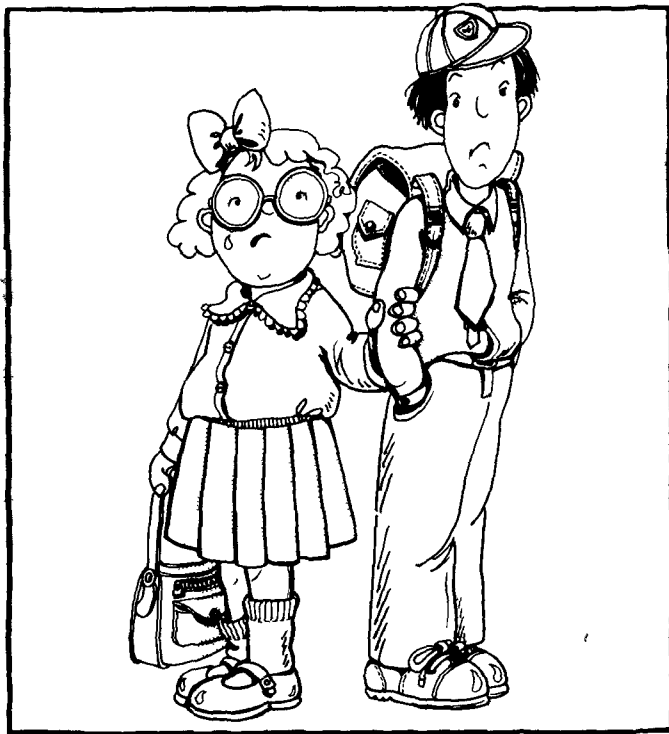


- 1 With older children working in pairs, give one pupil map A and the other map B. Pupil A explains to Pupil B where the various places are, or Pupil B can ask where the places are. This is a restricted free exercise in that the vocabulary and language structures are limited, but that's how it should be. Don't give pupils exercises which are so free that they don't know where to start or can't cope linguistically.

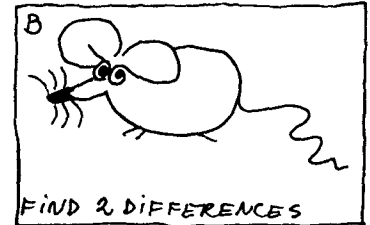
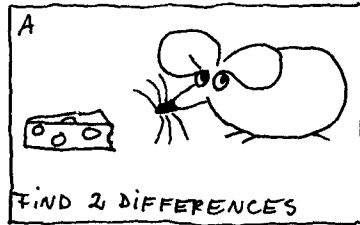


- 2 Here's an activity commonly used with younger children, but made a bit more communicative in the language sense by adding the information gap principle. Give everyone in the class a picture to colour – use one in your workbook. We've used a boy and a girl. Ask all the As in the class to colour the girl and all the Bs to colour the boy. Walk around and encourage them to talk to you about what they're doing. When they've finished, put an A with a B facing each other and ask them to ask the other person how they've coloured in their part of the picture: 'What colour is his shirt?' 'What colour is her blouse?' etc. It's important that they don't show each other or the point disappears. (They can stand a book up between them.) When they've finished, they should end up with two identical pictures. If they don't, then there's something wrong with their colour or clothes vocabulary! Note here that although the language limits are decided by the picture, the pupils still decide for themselves which colours they are going to use.

This drawing is from
Wendy Scott's *Are You
Listening?* Hong Kong
Edition



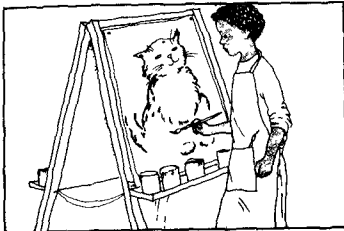
In both these activities the teacher plays a non-dominant role – that of the organiser. The same is true for all these sorts of activities, whether pupils are matching cards, playing Happy Families, describing a picture for other pupils or doing a ‘find the differences’ activity in pairs:



Groupwork

There are lots of examples of groupwork throughout this book, but here are two which are easy to arrange, fun to do, quite easy to organise and which concentrate on oral work.

- 1 Take any picture story from your textbook or workbook, copy it, cut it up and give one picture to each member of the group.



This example is from the *Longman Picture Dictionary*

Each pupil then has to describe to the others what is in his or her picture without showing it to the others. When the pupils have heard what is in all the pictures, the group decides on the correct order of the pictures.

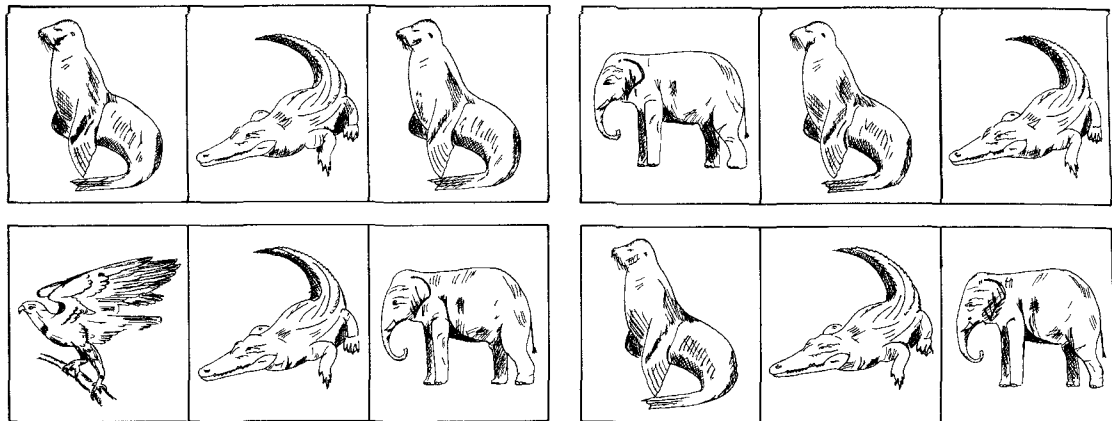
- 2 Another story-telling exercise which needs a bit more imagination and is most suitable for the eight to ten year olds at level two is where everyone in the group has two objects or pictures of objects which have to be woven into a story. You can use your own objects or you can ask pupils to bring them along or decide beforehand what their two objects will be. You start off the story – ‘I met a family yesterday who had never been in Hong Kong before. They were visiting

my neighbours.' The story then continues with one pupil adding to the story using his or her object, which might be a packet of tea, or a toy car, or whatever: 'Of course, they had tea with me' or 'I went out in the car with them' or whatever sentence comes out. As the story continues, it gets funnier and more ridiculous, and pupils have to help each other in the end to work their word into the story. This can also be done as a class story.

Whole class activities

In these activities all the pupils get up and walk about. Inevitably, they tend to be a bit noisy, and if you have more than thirty pupils in your class, you should split them into smaller groups.

- 1 The first activity is a matching activity. Make cards which are similar, but a little bit different.



Make two copies of each (if you want to make the activity more complicated, make several copies of each). Each pupil has one card, which they look at, memorise, and leave face down on the desk. Everyone then walks around trying to find the person with the identical card just by talking to each other. When they think they have the same cards, they check by looking at their cards, and then sit down at their places. If you have more than two copies of each card, then the activity will continue until all the matching cards have been found. This kind of activity is useful for prepositions, colours, actions and all sorts of object vocabulary.

2 Another activity which is useful and versatile and which we have already touched on in the listening chapter is using questionnaires. These are a mixture of groupwork and whole class work, as well as a mixture of written work and oral work. They can be guided or free activities. Split the class up into groups – the size will depend on how many pupils are in your whole class – and give them each a different task. Ask them to find out about favourite foods, favourite books, favourite television programmes, how much television people watch, when bedtime is, how much pocket money they get or whatever is relevant to what you are working on at the time. With the five to seven year olds you will have to provide the questionnaire, which might look something like this:

Which day do you like best?

name	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Salim				✓			

The eight to ten year olds should be able to work out their own questionnaire, although they will probably need help to work out the actual questions to ask to find out the information they want, and they will have to write them down. Again their questionnaire may end up being simple, just like the one above, or it may be quite complex if you have level two pupils. This one was used to find out who watched the most television, boys or girls, and if boys watched different types of programmes from girls.

- a) Detective
- b) Pop
- c) News
- d) Sport
- e) Films
- f) Series
- g) Children's T.V.
- h) Others

Name	Boy/Girl	Week days	Weekends	Type
Suda	B	2 hours	2 hours	b

Once the preparatory written work is done, they can all go around asking each other their own questions. They can present their results orally or in writing. Again, this is a structured activity but it involves communication and doing something with the information they're told. It can also involve a little bit of arithmetic and the setting up of tables.

Questions and activities

- 1 Look back at the exercise at the bottom of page 38. It uses cards which are all about food. Can you think of more topics you could make cards for?
- 2 Look at your textbook and list the activities from one lesson which are designed to practise oral language. Do you like them? Do you think they will be useful for your class? If you're not happy with them, how would you make them more suitable for your class?
- 3 Either on your own or with a colleague, add some more free oral activities to the ones given in this chapter. They may be things you've done in class or read about elsewhere, or they may be activities which you've thought out yourself.

References

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