



CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what they know and deepen their understanding of issues and interest in the ESL field.

Teaching English as a Lingua Franca

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Mauri: But don't you agree that all people of the world that they should speak English?

Joy: I would like to know erm what is English so important for the people in the globe.

(Source: House, 2003, p. 146)

This conversation introduces two major ideas of this paper: first, today many people believe English is an important language to learn; and second, as illustrated in this conversation, many interactions in English today are taking place between L2 (i.e., second language) and L2 speakers of English.

For many English learners today, English is used primarily as a language of wider communication with other L2 speakers. For example, a Korean tourist might use English when traveling to Thailand. A Japanese business person might use English with another business person from India. In such cases, English is used since there is no other common language to use. This use of English is called English as a lingua franca (ELF). Since it is thought that today about 80 percent of exchanges in English do not involve native speakers of English, it is important to think about how we can help learners to communicate with each other when they may not be fully fluent in English. The following are some things that need to be taught.

1. Attention should be given to introducing and practicing *expressions of clarification* used when someone doesn't understand the other person. To start, teachers need to introduce expressions that can be used when a speaker doesn't understand a word or phrase, such as
 - "I'm sorry I don't understand what X means,"
 - "What is X?"
 - "Could you say that again?" or
 - "Could you speak more slowly please?"

As practice, students could be given the first line of the dialogue in which there is a word most students don't know. Then the students should try to find out what this words means using the expressions they were given. They might ask a partner who has been told the meaning of the difficult word. Teachers should remind students that they should always try to find out what someone is saying when they don't understand something rather than letting it pass and acting as if they understand.

2. Teachers should also introduce students to *common conversational expressions* used to express interest in what the other person is saying, express agreement and disagreement, give compliments, say thank you, and so on. For instance, the dialogue at the beginning of the article uses the expression, “but don’t you agree?” Speakers often use such expressions to find out if their listener agrees with them.

To begin teachers need to introduce students to the ideas of speech acts. Then, teachers need to introduce expressions that are commonly used to perform a particular speech act like giving compliments and expressing thanks. Speech acts are typically routine statements that speakers use to perform particular functions like apologies, requests, compliments, and refusals. Often speech acts contain a variety of typical parts. For example, apologies can include some or all of the following parts.

- An expression of apology. This can be expressed with statements like “I’m sorry” or “I apologize.”
- An acknowledgement of responsibility for what happened. Statements like “It’s my fault” or “I didn’t mean to” can serve this purpose.
- An explanation. Here the speaker says why something happened.
- Offer of repair. In this part, speakers offer to do something to make up for their mistake.
- A promise that the same thing will not happen again.

After students are given an explanation of speech acts, they need to be provided with contexts to practice various phrases that express a particular speech act. For example, there are several expressions that can be used to apologize like

- “Excuse me.”
- “I’m sorry.”
- “I’m so sorry.”
- “I apologize.”

In general teachers should introduce various expressions that can be used to perform a particular speech such as apologizing and then provide practice in using these forms before moving to another speech act. Also it is good to place these expressions in a dialogue so that students learn when it is appropriate to say “I’m sorry” and when it is appropriate to say “I apologize.”

3. Finally teachers need to help student understand how speech acts can differ from one culture to another. For example, students from different cultural backgrounds can report on how they generally receive a compliment when they use their first language and on what things they compliment others on in their culture. The point of making these cross-cultural comparisons is to help students recognize that the L2 speakers they interact with may have very different expectations from their own about how to express a particular speech act.



Hopefully by focusing on the points listed above, teachers can help students communicate more effectively in English as a lingua franca exchanges.

Please take the time to give us the addresses of anyone else you think might be interested in receiving this newsletter of the CAPE Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk. And don't forget to write us with any comments you might have. Mahalo!

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