

Teaching Vocabulary in Conversation

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(Based in part on Laurey Martin-Berg, 2008)

Selecting the conversation

In creating a conversation or selecting one from the book, ask yourself these questions. If the answer is NO, change the conversation until you can answer YES.

1. The conversation should be natural language, and the context should be clear and authentic-like.
Does the conversation give a message that students might need to convey? Is that message conveyed in a culturally appropriate way?
2. The speakers should be well defined and use appropriate registers.
Who is talking to whom? about what? Should students use this language?
3. The conversation should be short enough for students to use.
Are the lines short enough to be learned (able to be broken into groups of less than 7 syllables)? Are there clear cues for who talks next?
4. There should be ways to vary the conversation so that students can use the conversational frame to convey their own ideas.
Can students learn other expressions or words to build on this conversation and convey different messages?

OVERVIEW: Tell students what topic they are going to learn to talk about.

Previewing the conversation

1. Overview: Tell students they will hear a conversation and give these details: Where it takes place, who is talking to whom, about what.
2. Preparation: Give students a reason for listening. What do they want to know? Give them 1-2 questions now that they will answer after hearing the conversation.
3. Listening Practice: Act out the conversation. Make it clear who is talking (use hats, write names on the board and stand in front of the one who is talking, vary your voice if it doesn't make comprehension difficult, use a recording of two speakers, work with a colleague).
4. Check/Verification: Ask the 1-2 comprehension questions you gave students before their listening, and if students cannot answer, present the conversation again.

Teaching vocabulary

1. Overview: Tell students what group of vocabulary they are going to learn, and how they will be able to use these words and expressions.

Practice:

1. Group words as you present them to facilitate the learning process. The groupings can be thematic or grammatical (food and drink: group by meal, first food, then beverages; body parts: start at the head and move down; places: first masculine nouns, then feminine). Teach new words in relation to words students already know.

2. Present and practice new vocabulary in a cyclical (spiral) rather than a linear fashion: Introduce 3-4 words, practice them, then add 3 more words, interspersing review of the first 4 words, then add 3 more, continuing to review words from the first groups.

3. Use visuals whenever possible so students associate new words with objects/images rather than with English equivalents. Be aware of the cultural implications of the objects/images you choose.

4. Take advantage of students' receptive skills to give them confidence by moving from minimal responses to fully productive responses.

Focus first on comprehension. Use student's receptive skills (listening).

Show me the book. (Students point.)

Is this a book? (Students answer yes/no.)

Is this a book or a pen? (Students give one word answer they have just heard modeled.)

Focus on pronunciation. Have students practice their productive skills (speaking). Use lots of repetition, varying between choral and individual. Continue to use visuals/objects to link sounds with meaning.

What is this? (Students recall word and pronounce it correctly.)

What does one read? (Students link new word to previously learned verb.)

Focus on spelling. Have students practice several skills (reading, speaking, writing). Link pronunciation with written form.

Pass out slips, each with the name of an object. Student must come forward, locate the object and tell the class what it is.

Hold up an object. Have students write the word that names it.

5. Be aware of different learning styles: provide visual, tactile, and oral support. If spelling helps, show it briefly from time to time.

6. Provide lots of practice (choral repetition by whole group or partial groups; pair work; individual responses) as well as frequent learning checks

Check:

1. Have students use the new vocabulary to say something new
2. Have students ask the questions and others answer
3. Stand-up activity: All students stand. As each student says something new using the words and expressions, s/he sits down. This activity encourages volunteers!

Putting it together: Vocabulary in conversation.

FINAL CHECK

Have students demonstrate that they have achieved the goal(s) set forth in your overview.

1. You do a conversation with a student: repeat with 2-3 different students.
2. Have students do conversations in pairs, expressing their own meaning
3. Ask students questions to verify their understanding of the vocabulary in the context of the conversation. Have them demonstrate learning rather than your asking "Do you understand?"

Directions for micro-teaching Teaching Vocabulary in Conversation

You will teach your language to a group of 6-8 TAs. Most TAs will be from other languages, but you might have some from your language as well.

Write or select a conversation that could be taught in the first few days of class. Assume no knowledge among your TA-students. (Recommended: conversation of 4-6 lines)

Select a set of words or expressions to accompany the conversation that students can use to enrich and personalize it. (Recommended: 6-8 additional words or expressions)

Prepare a lesson to teach vocabulary in conversation, according to the model demonstrated. Time 10-12 minutes.

Remember to structure your lesson around the framework
OVERVIEW, PREPARATION, PRACTICE, CHECK.
Make this structure clear so that we can discuss it after your lesson.

Prepare visuals and, if appropriate for your language, plan how to give clear written support at some time during the lesson.

Rules of the Lesson: Do it ALL in the target language. INVOLVE students. Tell talk as much as you do. They need the practice; you don't!

As you prepare, practice out loud, and play both roles: Be the teacher and actually say what you expect students to say as you go through the lesson. This exercise is very enlightening.

Time your lesson: 10-12 minutes.