The Tides of ELT*

*English Language Teaching

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Worthing Pier, south coast of England.
Living by the sea I am now much more aware of tides and cycles.

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The beach landscape

Stable land

The action of tides and currents creates sand dunes and salt marsh. These will eventually become stable land, often with our help via drainage and pumping.

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The beach landscape

Interesting driftwood

Tides and currents also bring driftwood onto the shore. It is fascinating, and can be carved into wonderful shapes by artists. But sand fails to accumulate around it, there is nothing for plants to take root in, and eventually it disappears - perhaps out to sea on another tide.

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The beach landscape

Ever-moving pebbles

Pebbles provide a constant background to the beach scenery. They have always been there, and always will be. They just move around, rearranging themselves into endless new configurations.

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The beach landscape

Seaweed. It washed up onto shore. It might have provided food for some initially, but it was wet and soggy and lacked substance. It soon decomposed and rotted away.

Decomposing seaweed

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Let’s look at some big ideas in ELT

Stable land

Ever-moving pebbles

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Task Based Learning (TBL)

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- Better to focus on meaning first, not form, and 'to encourage learners to use language even if it is not accurate'.
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- During the task: the teacher can 'reshape and supply'.
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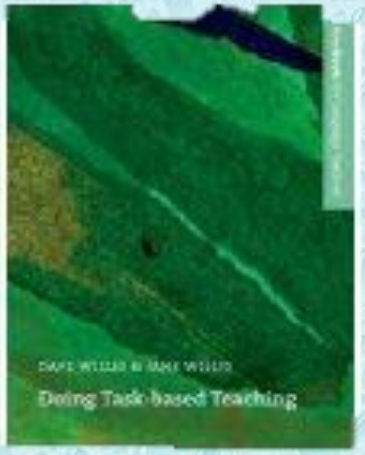

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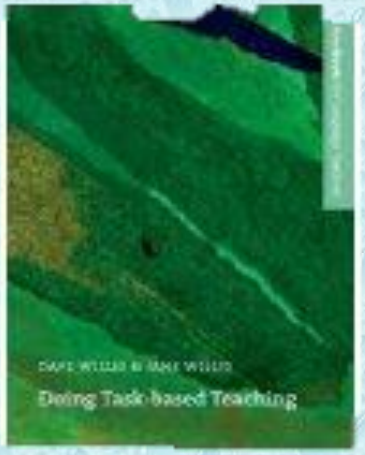
- During the task: the teacher can 'reshape and supply'.
- After the task: the teacher can focus on isolated forms if needed.
- 'advocates will spend most of the time in the classroom on activities which promote communicative language use, but will supplement these with activities designed to promote accuracy'



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Some issues with TBL …

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Coursebook units in the 1980s and 1990s had a structure PPP (main part) + ‘Skills Practice’ (at the end). And Skills Practice is tasks!

So … **tasks were always there.**

My reading of *A Framework for Task Based Learning* is that the authors were unaware that ‘old Skills Practice’ = ‘Tasks’. If they were aware of it, they should have contrasted TBL with Skills Practice, not PPP, to show their new ideas and approaches.

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By contrasting TBL with PPP rather than Skills Practice the authors (IMHO) set up ‘a straw man’.

‘a straw man’ - an opposing point of view set up (through oversight or misrepresentation) so as to be easily defeated.

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Contrary to what TBL suggests, the final P of PPP does *not* refer to free speaking. *Free speaking is skills practice* and comes at a different place in the book/lesson.

- The first P of PPP is *presentation* of a form or word or phrase (eg via a reading or listening text).
- The second P of PPP refers to '*controlled practice*' (gapfill; matching beginning to end of phrases; simple exercise putting verbs into correct form).
- The third P of PPP refers to '*less controlled practice*' – getting students to speak (produce) the form in a simple way, with some personalization.

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See opposite for an example of the third P for the form *'ll* for decisions and offers.

Speaking: Quick decisions

8 Work in pairs. Practise making decisions, offers and promises. Take it in turns to read a situation to your partner. They should respond and say what they will do.
Student A: Turn to File 18, page 142.
Student B: Read the situations below.

A: Your shirts are dirty.
B: I'll take them to the cleaners.

1 Your mother rang while you were out.
2 It's very hot in this room.
3 The wastepaper bin is full.
4 The gas company sent us another bill today (a red one).
5 I'd like to speak with your manager.
6 The sweater you bought is too big.
7 This light doesn't work.
8 There aren't any taxis.
9 I can't find my house keys.
10 Help! The building's on fire!

Lifestyle Pre-Intermedite, Hollett & Whitby

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This third P is often missing from coursebooks. Imagine a typical page on ‘the language of meetings’ from any coursebook:

- *Presentation*. Listen to this audio. Tick the (target) phrases you hear. **Yes**.
- *Controlled practice*. Fill in the gaps with missing words (from the target phrases), or match the beginnings to the endings, or match a phrase to a function. **Yes**.
- *Less controlled practice*. A chance to produce (speak) the target phrases in isolation, with some personalization. **Missing.**
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One - not the only - reason for the demise of the third P is that it came under sustained attack by TBL. They said: why force students to 'produce' language in this atomized, mechanical way?

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I think it is a shame that the third P has largely disappeared from BE coursebooks. It was there in the early 1990s in *Business Objectives* and *Business Opportunities*.

In my teaching I try to replace it by drilling the phrases from the audio script.

I *don't* expect this audiolingual drilling will increase the chance of students using the phrases in the task to follow.

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I *do* expect that it will promote noticing of and attention to the phrases, will give one more turn in working memory, and will make it a little more likely that the phrases are retained (passively) in long-term memory to be activated (weeks/months) later.

This is the function of the third P. And the second P. And the first P (attention and noticing, perhaps not for the first time).

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We need all the Ps we can get.

It doesn't matter too much where in the lesson or the book they come.

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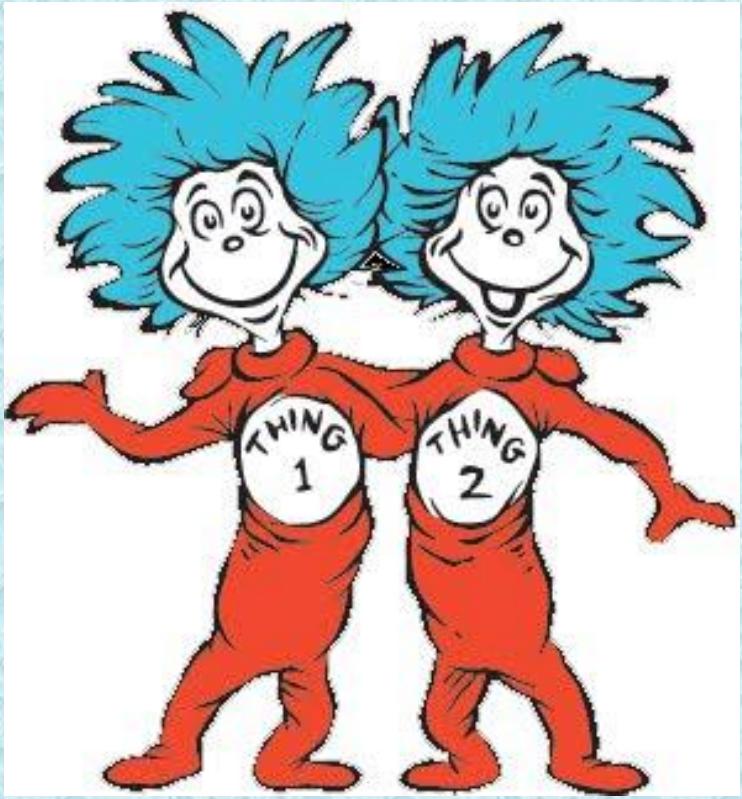
TBL is fine. So is PPP + Skills Practice.

By all means, prepare and supply language for a real-life task. It might get used in the task. It might not. It might get used and then immediately forgotten for ever.

By all means, present and practise language in a conventional way, followed by a fluency activity.



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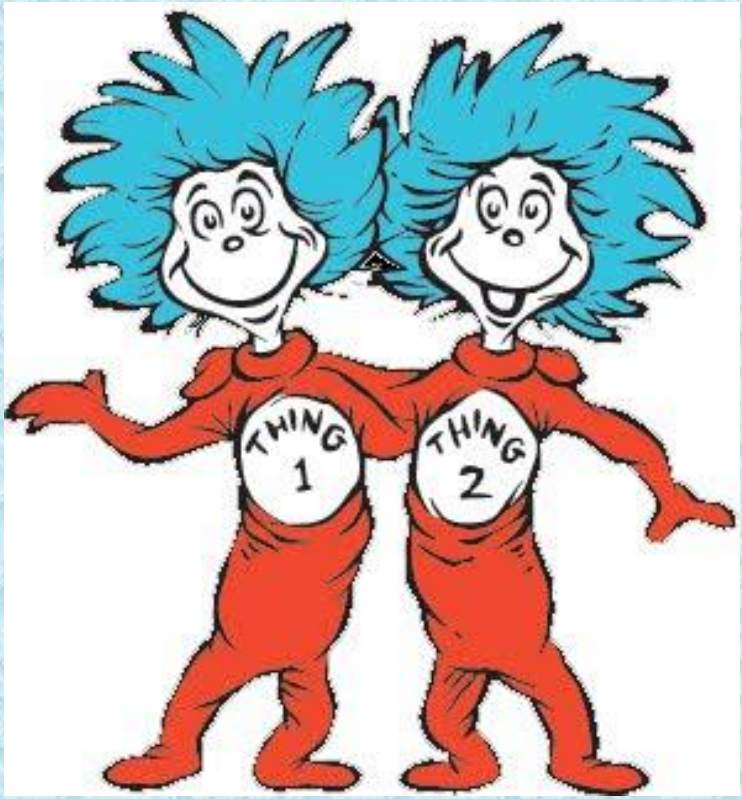
Both are worth doing and it doesn't make too much difference for language acquisition.

In *both* cases most forms/words will only be acquired and then produced spontaneously months/years later. Of course good language learners are an exception: 1 in 10 get it straight away.



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- Some of the language pre-task will indeed get used and remembered.

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And …

Pre-task language, no matter how it is prepared/presented/practised, serves to '*activates the schema*' for the speaking activity. It becomes an extended language-based Warmer.

Take the example of the language of meetings. The P-P of the phrases at the beginning *takes the students into the world of meetings in their heads*.

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That's life.

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- TBL is very difficult to implement systematically in a coursebook, and coursebooks are the lifeline of many teachers (new teachers, pre-experience teachers). I remember that when *Cutting Edge* first appeared it had 'Task Based Learning' on the front cover. That disappeared in later editions.

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Actually, if you do want hard-core TBL, try *In At The Deep End* (pub 1996, so written before the first TBL book came out). It was very formative in my career.

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That’s a lot of issues … but at the big picture level TBL did have a positive impact.

- It allowed us BE teachers of in-work students to give a name to what we were doing anyway: spending lots of time in class with our students doing role-plays, practising presentations etc.

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- Tasks are more liberally sprinkled throughout a unit now, not just left to the end as Skills Practice. And they are better designed.

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Let's remind ourselves of three features of the TBL mix:

1 'Advocates spend most of the time in the classroom on communicative language use'.
2 Reshaping and supplying language during speaking.
3 A suspicion of 'atomized' language presented 'mechanically' in coursebooks.

Push #3 a little harder and you get …

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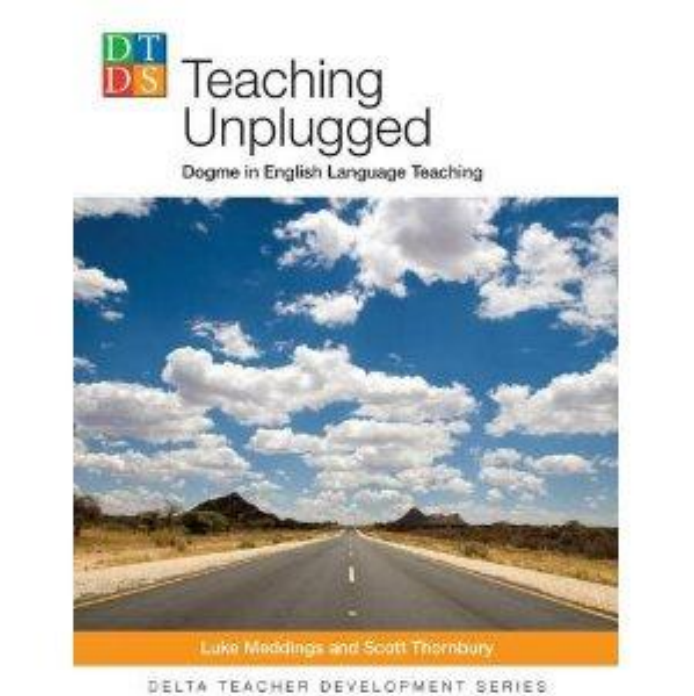
Dogme



Important term: ‘emergent language’. This is language produced during a speaking activity, not pre-selected by a coursebook or teacher.

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Dogme

First, a huge amount of my teaching in class is materials-light and deals with emergent language. Dogme makes sense to me. It's what I (often) do.

But was it always so for me? Not when I started teaching.

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An experienced teacher. Note the lack of books. This photograph, taken in the wild, shows her actually attempting to scaffold a student mid-task.

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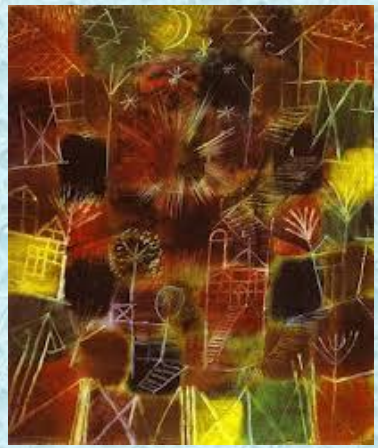
Think of artists' early and late work.

Matisse, aged 25

Matisse, aged 83



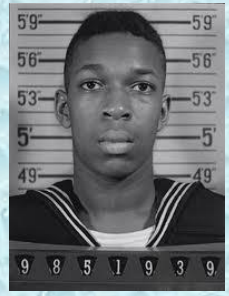
Klee, aged 40

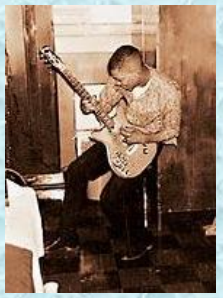
Klee, aged 61

Think of Coltrane/Hendrix as *early teenagers*, practising scales again and again.

Then as *late teenagers*, playing jazz/blues standards using conventional riffs and fingerings.

Then in their *twenties*: unplugged to tradition; free to jam with the emergent sounds that the rest of the band make; being lost in the moment and only sketchily referring to chord changes and the melodies of verse and chorus.





So … structure and complexity (coursebooks, lesson plans) come in our careers *before* spontaneity and simplicity (Dogme, responding in real time to emergent language).

We need P-P-P of our teaching techniques before we can achieve effortless fluency of them.

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Creative simplicity, trusting in the present moment and being lost in its flow, *is almost impossible to achieve without 'learning the tools of our trade' first.*

We say of all experts: 's/he makes it look so easy'.

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Dogme comes to us in the end as a natural process. We can try to short-circuit and get to the lush pastures of creative simplicity more quickly. In the process we might have fun and some success. But I don't think we'll get very far.

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In addition …

Level is important. I recently taught a Pre-Intermediate group after several years of only teaching Intermediate and higher. I really needed a book.

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Level is important. I recently taught a Pre-Intermediate group after several years of only teaching Intermediate and higher. I really needed a book.

Teaching situation is important. If I taught large pre-experience groups in a university or college I'd really, really need a book.

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- What practical techniques for feedback do we have at our disposal? How can we use them well and appropriately?

This is the bread and butter of a BE teacher's life.
These are the real-time decisions we constantly make in the classroom.

Do these issues get reflection and discussion in TBL and Dogme? Not too much.

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Take the first point:

– Do we supply/reshape/scaffold *during* the task, or let the task run and give language feedback *after*?

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I beg to differ. In general I think that *post-task* rather than *during-task* is the best place to do language work. I have been making this point as part of my 'ROLO' ideas in presentations, articles and teacher training since the late '90s. (ROLO = Reformulate Output Lightly but Often).

Here is the text from a slide that is part of the 'ROLO' slideshow on my site *www.paulemmerson.com* …

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On-the-spot help during the task?

Or Feedback at the board after the task?

- Good question! With no easy answer.
- If a student looks at you and asks for a word you give it of course. But make sure you just give the word and say nothing more, and then write it down and return to it in the feedback slot later as it may just get spoken and not remembered.
- The problems start when the teacher begins to explain: this takes the students *out* of their world of constructing their own meanings in their head and listening to other people, and back *into* the world of the classroom, language forms and taking notes.
- If they go backwards and forwards between these two mental worlds of a) meaning and b) form, then it becomes confusing and destroys much of the fluency. Incidentally, it also means that students are deprived of the chance to practise paraphrasing when they don't know a word.

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There doesn't seem to be a clear distinction - in both the TBL and the Dogme books - between *language correction* (accuracy work, usually grammatical) and *language development* (complexity work, usually lexical).

Without this distinction there is a danger that inexperienced teachers will take supplying/reshaping/scaffolding to mean:

- grammatical correction, or supplying of single unknown words

rather than

- language development, where what the student said was correct and fluent: it just wasn't complex enough to achieve the meaning they wanted and would have achieved in their own language.

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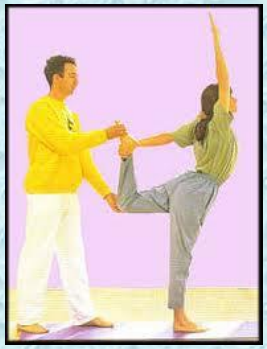
Take the third point:

– What practical techniques for feedback do we have at our disposal?



Where is the discussion - in both the TBL and Dogme books - of *practical classroom techniques* that constitute language feedback?

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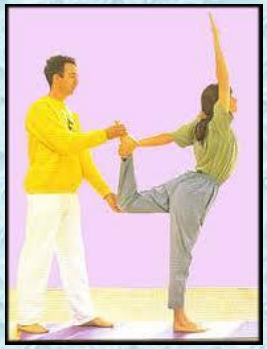

Where is the discussion - in both the TBL and Dogme books - of *practical classroom techniques* that constitute language feedback?

How and when to elicit? How and when to prompt? How and when to use concept questions? How and when to just give a form/word (and move on) as opposed to how and when to go into more detail?

These are examples of the complex real-time decisions that we have to make at the board during a feedback slot. Reflection on them is useful.

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Take the third point:

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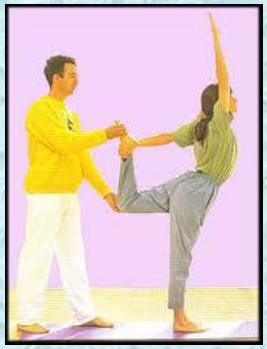

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These are examples of the complex real-time decisions that we have to make at the board during a feedback slot. Reflection on them is useful.

I have discussed these issues very thoroughly over the years in my ROLO articles/talks. On my site look at this slideshow:
www.paulemmerson.com/category/slideshow/
Or look at this article:
www.paulemmerson.com/articles/rolo-reformulate-output-lightly-but-often/

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From my corner of the rockpool
it looks like TBL and Dogme are both derived
from the age-old debate:

Linguistic vs Communicative Competence

Dell Hymes, 1966

(with both favouring the 'communicative' side)

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Linguistics vs Communicative Competence

Stable land

Ever-moving pebbles

Interesting driftwood

Decomposing seaweed

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Giving my own personal view, …

doing lots of speaking

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Giving my own personal view, …

doing lots of speaking

with tasks being both authentic (giving a presentation) and inauthentic (a roleplay, case study or discussion that you wouldn't do in real life)

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Giving my own personal view, …

doing lots of speaking

with tasks being both authentic (giving a presentation) and inauthentic (a roleplay, case study or discussion that you wouldn't do in real life)

with post-speaking language feedback

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Giving my own personal view, …

- doing lots of speaking
- with tasks being both authentic (giving a presentation) and inauthentic (a roleplay, case study or discussion that you wouldn't do in real life)
- with post-speaking language feedback
- that has plenty of language development

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is definitely …

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Grammar

Does it need defending? Unfortunately, yes.

- A common attitude in BE: *who ever lost a deal by using the wrong past tense?*

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Grammar

Does it need defending? Unfortunately, yes.

- A common attitude in BE: *who ever lost a deal by using the wrong past tense?*
- This attitude is reflected in the CertIBET syllabus (Trinity teacher-training) where there is **no mention of the teaching of language** (grammar, lexis, pronunciation).

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There is **a lot** to say about how to deal with language in Business English. Eg:

- post-task feedback techniques

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There is **a lot** to say about how to deal with language in Business English. Eg:

- post-task feedback techniques
- basic ways to work on pronunciation (drilling etc) for teachers with no General English training.

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I believe that ‘Language work in BE’ should be one of the 10 core modules of the CertIBET.

Grammar

Here are just some of the reasons for teaching grammar:

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Grammar

Here are just some of the reasons for teaching grammar:

- *Image*. Students want to be seen as being 'good at English' in front of colleagues and business contacts. Good grammar is a marker of an educated person. That's just the way the world is.

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Grammar

Here are just some of the reasons for teaching grammar:

- *Connection to fluency*. For many learners lack of grammar directly impedes fluency. It's annoying to have to stop and think about form all the time. Much better to have the forms routinized.

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Grammar

Here are just some of the reasons for teaching grammar:

- *Students want it*. They see grammar + vocabulary (+ pronunciation) + fluency as a package. To miss it out is to cut off one leg of the chair. Or, in a student's eyes, to fail to cover everything.

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- But please do check in your Needs Analysis: if *they* don't want grammar, fine. If *you* don't want it for ideological reasons (and you haven't asked them), not fine.

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Grammar

Here are just some of the reasons for teaching grammar:

- *The human mind's quest for patterns and completion*. Why read the last few chapters of a book? Why place another piece in a jigsaw? Why work through a grammar syllabus and try to get the exercises right? The reasons are similar: we do it for the satisfaction of getting closure, of seeing how the pieces fit together to make a complex whole. We want the story to finally make sense.

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Grammar

Stable land

Ever-moving pebbles

Interesting driftwood

Decomposing seaweed

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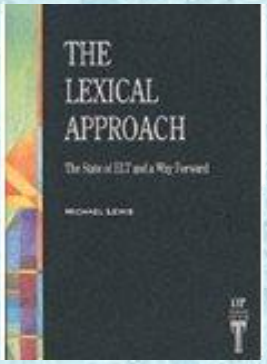
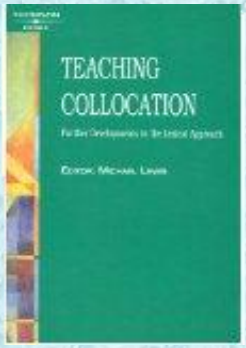
Lexical Approach

- Michael Lewis. First book 1993
- Before: vocabulary = single words
- After: lexis = single words + collocations + chunks of language. (He brought these ideas into the mainstream)
- Now have collocation dictionaries





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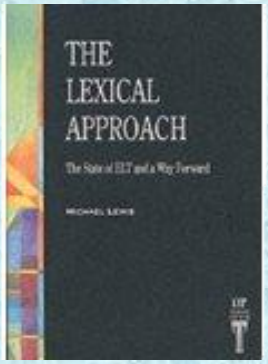
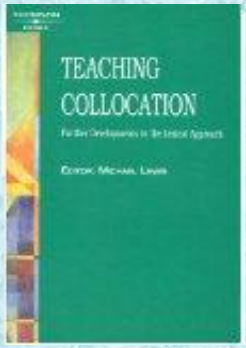
- After: lexis = single words + collocations + chunks of language. (He brought these ideas into the mainstream)
- Now have collocation dictionaries
- Plus: ML wrote very widely and perceptively in his books about all aspects of language acquisition in the classroom.
- Plus: He founded LTP, which brought us Mark Powell and Wilberg's One-To-One and much else.





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Lexical Approach

Stable land

Ever-moving pebbles

Interesting driftwood

Decomposing seaweed

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Can we make sense of all this?

I am a big fan of Michael Swan's 'Two Out Of Three Ain't Enough' model.

I think it helps to understand what is going on.

People who prioritize language over tasks or vice-versa, or who prioritize lexis over grammar or vice versa, or who have *any* big idea that just focuses on just one area, are missing the point.

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There is no magic bullet. Variety is everything.

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Yes, we need new ideas to improve our practice and keep us fresh.
But please try to avoid saying they are ‘the answer’.

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On the next slide is Michael’s model.
Take a moment to look at it carefully.

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A balanced programme

	Extensive	Intensive	Analysed
Input	Books, magazines, texts, etc. Speech (of other people)	Spoken or written texts studied in detail Material learnt by heart	Learning rules Looking at examples and lists
Output	Free speaking Free writing	Controlled speaking or writing, reusing learnt material.	Doing exercises

Michael Swan
'Two out of three ain't enough: the essential ingredients of a language course'
www.mikeswan.co.uk/elt-applied-linguistics/
This is reprinted on my site, with permission (note that there is a password to open the pdf, given on the site, that was included at Michael's request):
www.paulemmerson.com/articles/two-out-of-three-aint-enough/

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I was looking at this in a hotel room in Stuttgart before a presentation, and I suddenly realized it is …

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Presentation

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Less controlled practice

Controlled practice

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Reading and listening, both extensively and intensively

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Fluency

Less controlled practice

Controlled practice

In other words …

Any normal, good coursebook.

And so the model is a defence of coursebooks.

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Without a good book, or by relying too heavily on any one method such as TBL or Dogme or the Lexical Approach, the course programme may become unbalanced. Certain elements of the mix may be given too much time and others may be missed.

Michael gives several examples of this in his article ‘Two out of three ain’t enough’.

Michael: Why didn’t you call it ‘Three out of six ain’t enough?’ There are six boxes, not three.

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Michael Swan's 'Two Out Of Three Ain't Enough' model

Stable land

Ever-moving pebbles

Interesting driftwood

Decomposing seaweed

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Pragmatics and Politeness

Pragmatics: the way in which context contributes to meaning. It is a part of communicative competence.

Examples:

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- Doing work on politeness and directness in social situations and meetings.

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- Formality/Informality in emails, and what it depends on.

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- Doing work on ‘requests’ language.

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- Tip: I always point out that with requests, the appropriate phrase depends on *both* the power distance *and* the size of the favour.

	Me to brother	Me to boss
Small favour	*Can I* have some more of this delicious pasta with halloumi and pine nuts? You must give me the recipe.	*Would it be okay if I* left 10 minutes early today? I have a train to catch.
Big favour	*I wonder if I could* borrow your car on Sunday? Mine's at the garage.	*Are you in the middle of something? I have a favour to ask. I was wondering if I could* leave at three this afternoon to go to the dentist? I tried to get another appointment, but I couldn't.

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Pragmatics and Politeness

I think we've made big progress in this area in our BE materials.

It's not an easy thing to cover in a book.

We can congratulate ourselves.

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Pragmatics and Politeness

Stable land

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Pragmatics and Politeness

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Intercultural Awareness

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Intercultural Awareness

Intercultural Awareness has taken root in BE.
But what exactly is it?

Here's an interesting question:

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Intercultural Awareness

Is it a topic or a communication skill?

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Topics are things like marketing, business travel, economic context. Students have an interesting discussion (with language feedback) and learn some topic vocabulary. But at the end we *don't* expect learners to become better marketers, travellers or economists as a result of their time in the ELT classroom.

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Communication Skills are things like presentations, Social English, writing emails. Students practice them (with language feedback) and learn some functional expressions. And at the end we *do* expect learners to become better presenters, socializers or writers as a result of their time in the ELT classroom.

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It looks to me like Intercultural Awareness is often

- *sold as a communication skill*
  (come to me and I'll help you
  to be a more effective interculturalist)

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It looks to me like Intercultural Awareness is often

- *sold as a communication skill*
  (come to me and I'll help you to be a more effective interculturalist)
- *but delivered as a topic*
  (here is some information about different cultures, let's discuss it).

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I’m sure that intercultural behaviour and attitudes change as a result of the university of life, especially when we get something wrong.
We automatically reflect on the experience and learn from it so as not to lose face the next time.

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I’m sure that intercultural behaviour and attitudes change as a result of the university of life, especially when we get something wrong.
We automatically reflect on the experience and learn from it so as not to lose face the next time.

But in the classroom …?

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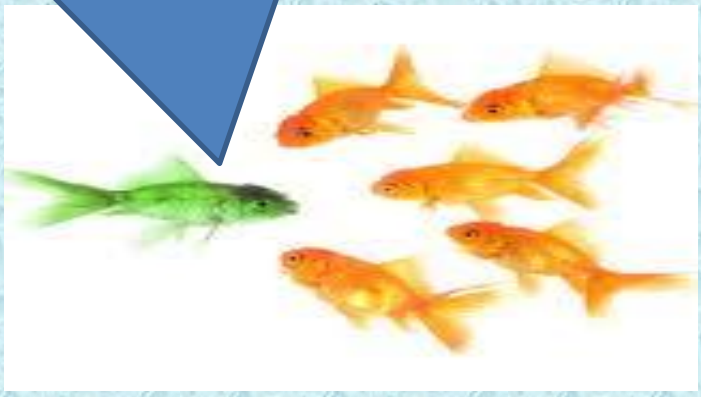
I swim in a sea where other fish are not like me. I try to be tolerant and treat everyone I meet as an individual, but I always end up stereotyping and getting annoyed and feeling that my way is the best. I'd like to learn how to get along with the other fish and do business with them. But I want to maintain my identity at the same time. Perhaps I should go for some training?



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- What classroom activities can change behaviour?

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- What classroom activities can change behaviour?
- How many activities are needed?

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- What classroom activities can change behaviour?
- How many activities are needed?
- What constitutes feedback from the trainer?

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- What classroom activities can change behaviour?
- How many activities are needed?
- What constitutes feedback from the trainer?
- How do we know that learning has been achieved?

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In BE people are trying to deal with these issues in all kinds of different ways, and these questions are of course common to all training in soft management skills.

Good luck to you if you manage to charge your clients a little more for adding interpersonal skills to your language training!

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Intercultural Awareness

And here's a warning.
Take a look at this article from the current (Nov '12) EL Gazette …

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Argentina sets new course

Intercultural supplants communicative as the watchword in bold Argentinian reforms, explains Silvana Barboni

The province of Buenos Aires now teaches EFL – and all school subjects – following a radical 'intercultural' and 'plurilingual' model from kindergarten to the last year of secondary school. The communicative approach has been used in Argentinean EFL since the 1980s, but in the view of Griselda Beacon, coordinator of ELT in primary education at the Ministry of Education of the Province of Buenos Aires, many communicative tasks in textbooks 'do not necessarily motivate our students'.

It is now no longer just about the 'utilitarian value' of 'certain foreign languages in the global business world', but about equipping 'students to also become responsible citizens that can contribute to their society', according to Beacon.

The Buenos Aires approach is based on models adopted in the ethnically diverse Argentinian province of Chaco and in Misiones, where 'Spanish interacts with native languages such as Guarani and local languages of ethnic groups such as German'.

How does intercultural education work in practice? Beacon gives some examples. 'In primary schools we have selected a number of nursery rhymes and popular songs and developed a variety of possible activities for ELT classrooms … Argentina has several aboriginal communities with their own languages who generally only learn Spanish when they start school, and 'German and French immigrants, among others, still preserve their languages,' explains Beacon.

I don’t get it.

Giving more classroom time to other languages, not just English or Spanish, is fine. It has saved Welsh in Wales for example.

But ‘becoming a responsible citizen’ is not a language activity that substitutes the communicative approach.

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The ideas in the article are like saying that we are now going to teach you that Ford, VW, Opel and Fiat are all equally deserving of our respect, instead of teaching you how to drive.

This is very, very confused thinking.

This article is a warning. Beware ‘intercultural awareness’ becoming a meaningless buzzword.

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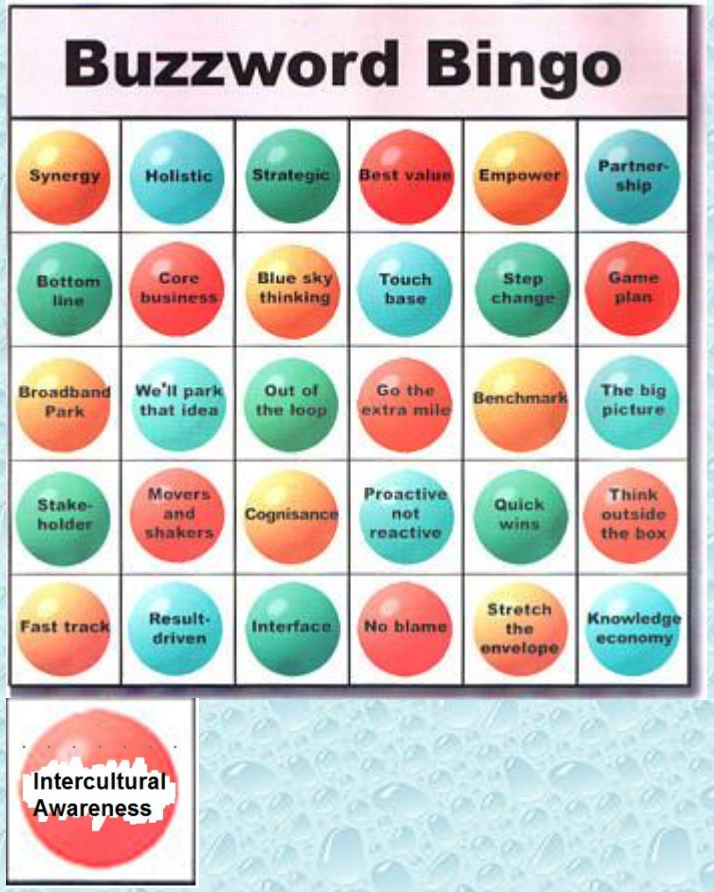

Intercultural Awareness

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Intercultural Awareness

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Ever-moving pebbles

Interesting driftwood

?

Buenos Aires

Decomposing seaweed

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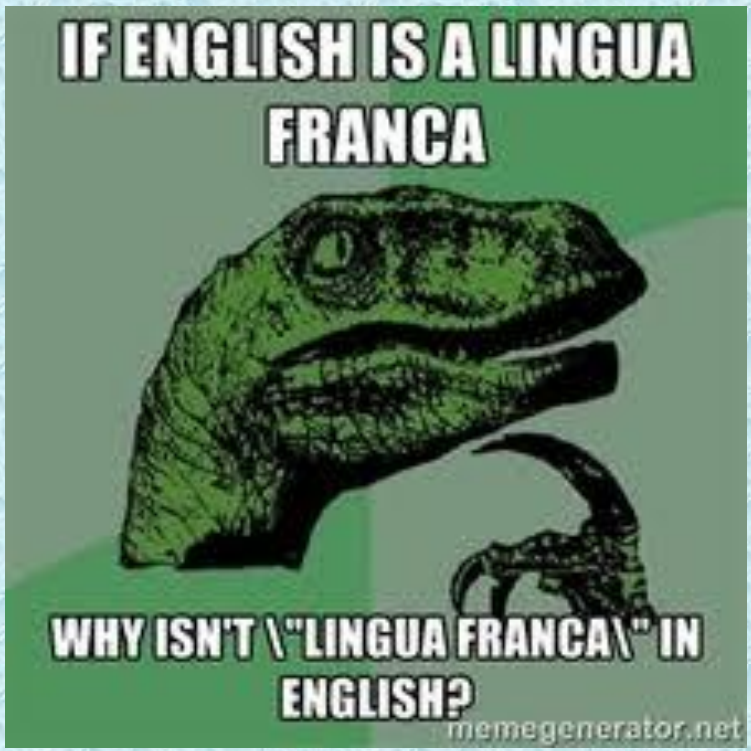
ELF

The proposition:

In an increasingly globalized world, native speakers are losing ‘control’ of English. A new form of English – English As A Lingua Franca – is emerging that has its own distinctive characteristics that are different from native-speaker English.



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Some background…

A few years ago at an IATEFL Conference I heard a speaker who gave the word ‘protocol’ as an example of ELF. This means ‘the minutes of the meeting’ across Europe, but does not have this meaning for native speakers (NS) – we say ‘minutes’.

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Some background…

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This set me thinking.

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‘Protocol’ is in fact one of many words that are a false friend (and the same false friend) in Latin, Germanic and Slavic languages. Another example would be ‘actually’ meaning ‘nowadays’, and ‘brute profit’ where a NS would say ‘gross profit’.

Why are they false friends across all three language groups? I don’t know and it doesn’t matter (but the influence of French as the original ‘lingua franca’ might have something to do with it).

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The first point is this: *protocol* means ‘minutes’ across Europe not because the global non-native speech community has started taking control of English, but for historical reasons going back a long way.

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‘Protocol’ is in fact one of many words that are a false friend (and the same false friend) in Latin, Germanic and Slavic languages. Another example would be ‘actually’ meaning ‘nowadays’, and ‘brute profit’ where a NS would say ‘gross profit’.

Why are they false friends across all three language groups? I don’t know and it doesn’t matter (but the influence of French as the original ‘lingua franca’ might have something to do with it).

The first point is this: *protocol* means ‘minutes’ across Europe not because the global non-native speech community has started taking control of English, but for historical reasons going back a long way.

The second point is this: if (most) Europeans use and understand *protocol* to mean ‘minutes’, but Asians, Arabs, Turks, and Anglo speakers **don’t**, then is it ELF? A European ELF maybe.

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A speaker's inter-language - the English they speak - is shaped by:

- L2 (whatever has been learnt, partially learnt or mislearnt from the target language at that moment in time)
- L1 interference (from their own language: sentence structure, word-for-word translation, false friends, etc).

If there is an ELF, it should contribute a third, 'L3' effect. This would be words/forms (including simplifications) **that arise from the global non-NS speech community**. This is where ELF should be hunted.

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Does ELF exist?

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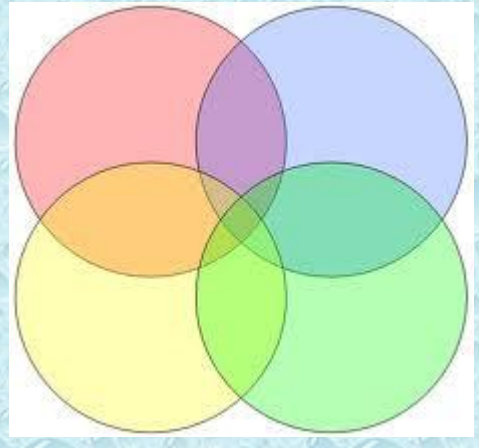
Concrete example: a Chinese person, a German, a Saudi and a Brazilian are having a business meeting. They are all speaking in English at approximately Intermediate level. Each is speaking in an inter-language with a different L1 interference.

They get along just fine. There is enough language in common for them to be mutually comprehensible.



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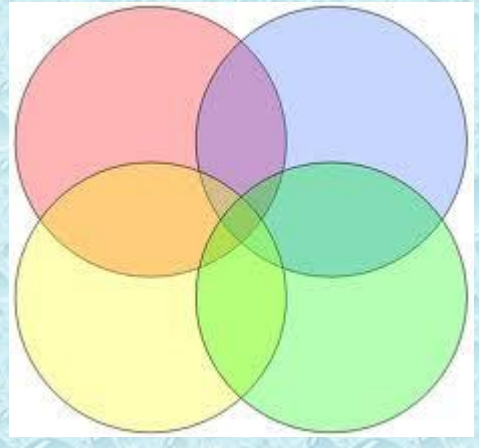

Is this ELF? It looks to me like a normal situation of people communicating in a common language that is not their own. It is like a class in my language school in Brighton. The conversation is taking place in overlapping inter-languages, not ELF. Nothing special or remarkable here.

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Here are some possible candidates for ELF. They have been chosen to be representative:

Vocabulary

actually (= nowadays)

actives and *passives* (= assets and liabilities)

concurrents (= competitors)

propose (overuse, where a NS would say *suggest* or *Let's* or *Shall we*)

possibilities (overuse, where a NS might say *alternatives* or *options*)

Grammar

misuse and lack of complexity in the use of past tenses

informations/softwares

use of *less* with countable nouns (less euros) where *fewer* is 'correct' NS

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actives and *passives* (= as

concurrents (= competitors)

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possibilities (overuse, where a NS might say *alternatives* or *options*)

More false friends that are common to Latin, Germanic and Slavic languages. They would not be understood with this meaning by Asians, Arabs, Americans and Australians.

Grammar

misuse and lack of complexity in the use of past tenses

informations/softwares

use of *less* with countable nouns (less euros) where *fewer* is 'correct' NS

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Possible candidates for ELF. But if the speaker has future exposure to the NS usages *and then starts to use them in a NS way*, their ELF status fails.

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use of *less* with countable nouns

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Grammar

misuse and lack of complexity in the use of past tenses

informations/softwares

use of *less* with countable

An interesting case. I think this shift/simplification may be in progress right now amongst native speakers as well.

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General points here:

- Please do not confuse common Latin/Germanic/Slavic false friends with ELF.

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General points here:

- Please do not confuse common Latin/Germanic/Slavic false friends with ELF.

- **Please do not confuse simplified native speaker English with ELF.**
  For simplified NS English to be ELF it has to be:
  - The destination point in the speaker's language, so that further exposure to NS models (used by both native speakers and non-native speakers) does not lead to NS usage.
  - Used by all language groups (European, Arabic, Asian AND Anglo).

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- Please do not confuse common Latin/Germanic/Slavic false friends with ELF.

- **Please do not confuse simplified native speaker English with ELF.**
  For simplified NS English to be ELF it has to be:
  - The destination point in the speaker's language, so that further exposure to NS models (used by both native speakers and non-native speakers) does not lead to NS usage.
  - Used by all language groups (European, Arabic, Asian AND Anglo). If ELF words and forms are *not* used by Americans, Brits, Australians, Canadians, South Africans, Indians, Nigerians etc., are they still ELF? Answer please.

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And remember: English has always been simplified by native speakers. A lot. And always will be.

thee, *thy*
less cars/people/euros (change happening now?)
lack of tag questions (Americans have always managed without these, right?)

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But … there is no reason in theory why an ELF should not develop. After all, there are millions of people in the world who do not strive for NS English.

They feel they communicate perfectly well in English at whatever level they have reached, have no interest in English language classes, etc. They exist outside our professional world.

There are hundreds of them for every one we teach.

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These people may in time develop an ELF. But can we have examples please? And remember: if these people get closer and closer to NS usage by passive exposure (not by instruction as they aren't attending classes), then it's not ELF.

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A ‘strong’ form of ELF is Globish:

By clicking here and then on ‘Globish Dictionary’, you can download a pdf of all 1500 Globish words.

*Note: **leading** a conversation in business*

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Below are just a few words that are **missing** from Globish. I thought them up in a minute and checked.

development	Really?	payment	disagree
income	tip	innovation	unfortunately
manager	invoice	long-term	receipt
survey	entrepreneur	client	brand

And of course Globish is all single words, no collocations (*special feature*) or functional expressions (*Can I get back to you?*).

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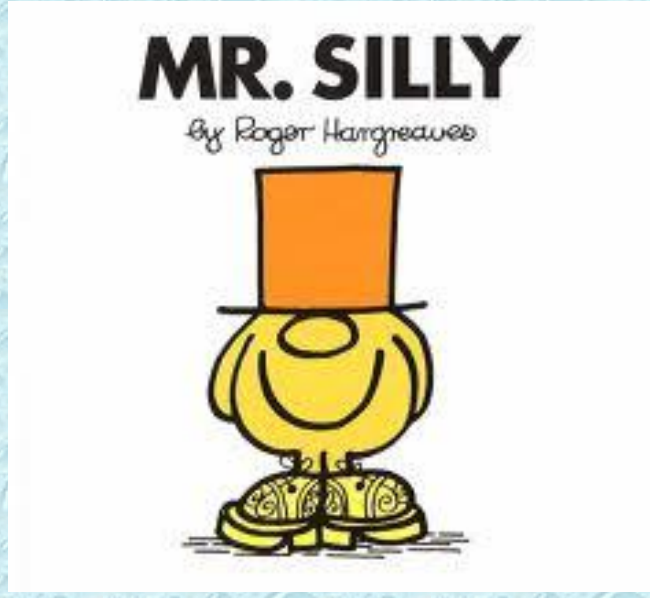
Yes, I know Globish isn't ELF, but it shows how silly these ideas can get.
And it shows us where the damage of this approach comes: not to our work on *accuracy*, but to our work on *complexity*.

Yes, learners can get by perfectly well on 'problem', 'target' and 'possibility', but do we want to deprive them of 'issue', 'aim/objective' and 'option/alternative'?

I don't.



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The last hideout of the ELFer:

All we're saying is that teachers should be more relaxed about accuracy.

Can you spot the straw man in this argument?

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We already **are** relaxed.

We **don't** apply native standards when giving input or feedback to Intermediate level students.

Our course books are **highly** level-aware.

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If you think we should be more relaxed about accuracy, then …

according to level

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And please explain why students **love** language feedback even after a speaking activity where they were 100% communicatively competent.

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At the end of the day the ELF position is that **students don't know what's good for them.**

ELF believes that students are trapped in a false consciousness of 'NS fluency as the ultimate goal', promoted by native speakers wanting to hold on to global power.

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In the words of Vitaly The Tiger from Madagscar 3

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That's a load of …

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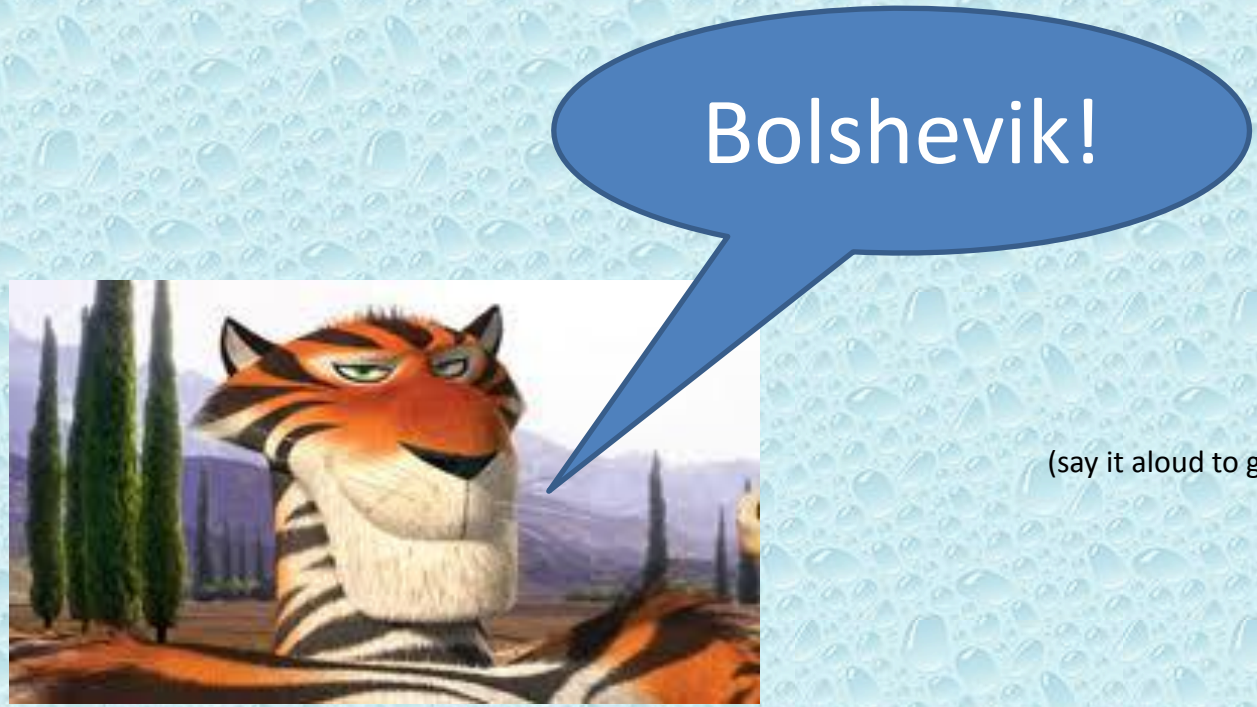

(say it aloud to get the joke)

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Our students are intelligent, self-selecting, paying clients.

By choosing to spend their valuable time and money on coming to an English language class they are choosing to improve their English.

If they don't want to improve, they don't come.

If they come and we give them ELF, they won't come back.

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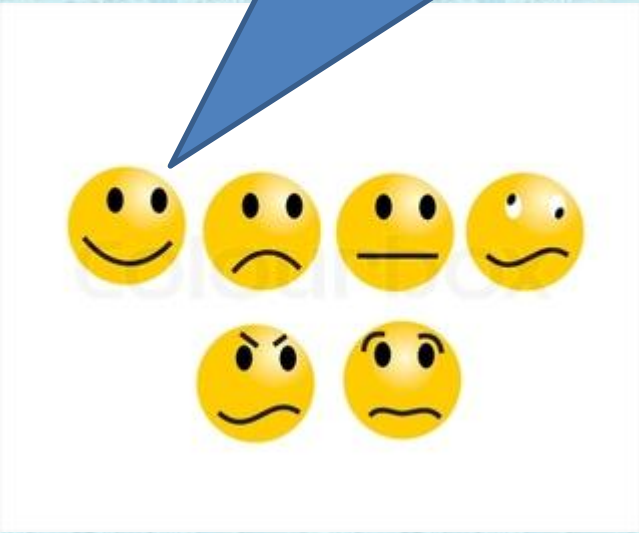
And, by the way, our students are doing just fine in the language power game. It's the native speaker who is at the disadvantage in the international meeting – no-one can understand him/her.

Low frequency lexis; analogies and metaphors lost on listeners; jokes with cultural references; fast connected speech; weak forms



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ELF

Stable land

Ever-moving pebbles

Interesting driftwood

Decomposing seaweed

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eLearning

Many of my students work for large companies that already use a lot of eLearning. This is not English-language eLearning (although it could be). It is any situation where 10 years ago a trainer would have stood up in front of a group with a flip chart, and trained.

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There are also usually a few on-screen questions to check understanding of the material at the end.

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And throw in some cheesy clipart.

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When I ask my students about their experiences of eLearning they invariably say …

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It’s boring.

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I have no direct involvement with eLearning right now, but do belong to various LinkedIn groups in this field and occasionally follow the discussions there. *A recurring theme is the need to engage the user (and the difficulty of doing so).*

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In companies there is also an obsession with the LMS (learner management system) that shows 'Return On Investment' by telling managers how much time employees spend on the eLearning, the progress in their scores, etc.

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So eLearning becomes (in a phrase often used in the LinkedIn discussion groups) …

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Bore and Score

eLearning does have some tidal characteristics.
At the height of the dotcom era (late ‘90s) language schools equipped their self-study rooms with multimedia CD-Roms. Here are a few:

These CD Roms are from the collection of Paul Brett, then Chair of the CALL (computer assisted language learning) SIG of IATEFL. Paul writes to me from the University of Wolverhampton:
Despite the technological changes seen since CD-Roms, I would argue that it was a unique time for computer applications to language learning, in that it afforded access to many media simultaneously for the first time ever , produced early designs and research into how best to provide these combinations and what to provide (sound, subtitles, glossaries, video, scaffolded support, feedback and the type of feedback, repetition, learner control). This has fed into Internet based applications.
I do collect language learning CD-Roms and am creating an archive. I will pay for postage for anyone who can contribute one. Please pass my e-mail on to anyone who would like to donate, or indeed to explore for research purposes.

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eLearning will develop, probably very fast. Here are some obvious issues:

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For presentation …

In print we have reading and listening. How can eLearning give an ‘e’ element to these, as well as using video in a way that is engaging?

Making progress on these fronts would certainly make things less boring.

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For practice …

Bore and Score is also due to the mechanical replacement of workbook style exercises with an online equivalent. For example, instead of ‘fill the gaps with the words in the box’ we have ‘drag and drop the words on your smartphone’; or instead of marking the correct answer A,B or C in a workbook we have doing it on-screen.

Can eLearning do better than this?

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And feedback on mistakes seems very underexploited.

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Can eLearning do better than this?

And feedback on mistakes seems very underexploited.

For fluency (face-to-face online teaching) …

Google Hangouts is free and promising – several students in front of their webcams with the teacher as well, and shared documents.
But … no pairwork; sharing of audio and video more difficult than text; students look at screen not webcam so no eye contact; and rather ‘stilted’ (unrelaxed and unnatural) group discussions and activities.

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eLearning

Stable land

Ever-moving pebbles

Interesting driftwood

Decomposing seaweed

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eLearning

⇨?

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Before I finish, I'd like to go in a new direction.
Will you follow me?

Tidal/sea metaphor thing not done yet.

There are two shoals of slippery fish that lie offshore, but within reach of our nets.

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There are two shoals of slippery fish that lie offshore, but within reach of our nets.

- **The workings of memory**

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There are two shoals of slippery fish that lie offshore, but within reach of our nets.

- **The workings of memory**
- **Sub-technical vocabulary (rather than topic vocabulary or functional expressions)**

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First slippery fish: the workings of memory

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The workings of memory

The secret that dares not speak its name:

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The workings of memory

The secret that dares not speak its name:

How easily and well you learn a language
may be just down to how good your memory is.

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The workings of memory

The secret that dares not speak its name:

How easily and well you learn a language
may be just down to how good your memory is.
And have nothing to do with materials and methods.

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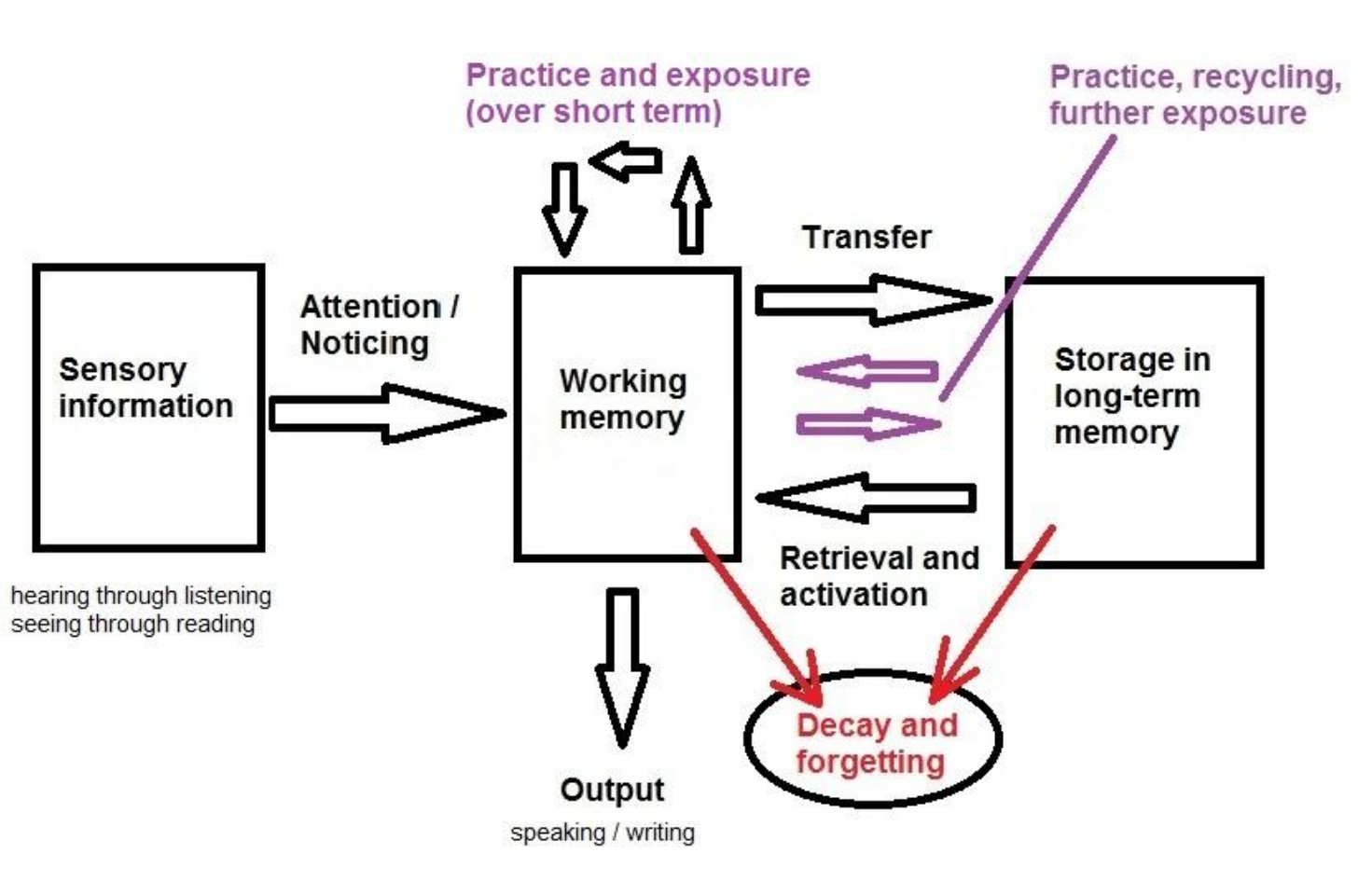
Memory in language learning

(diagram produced by me from a variety of Google images)



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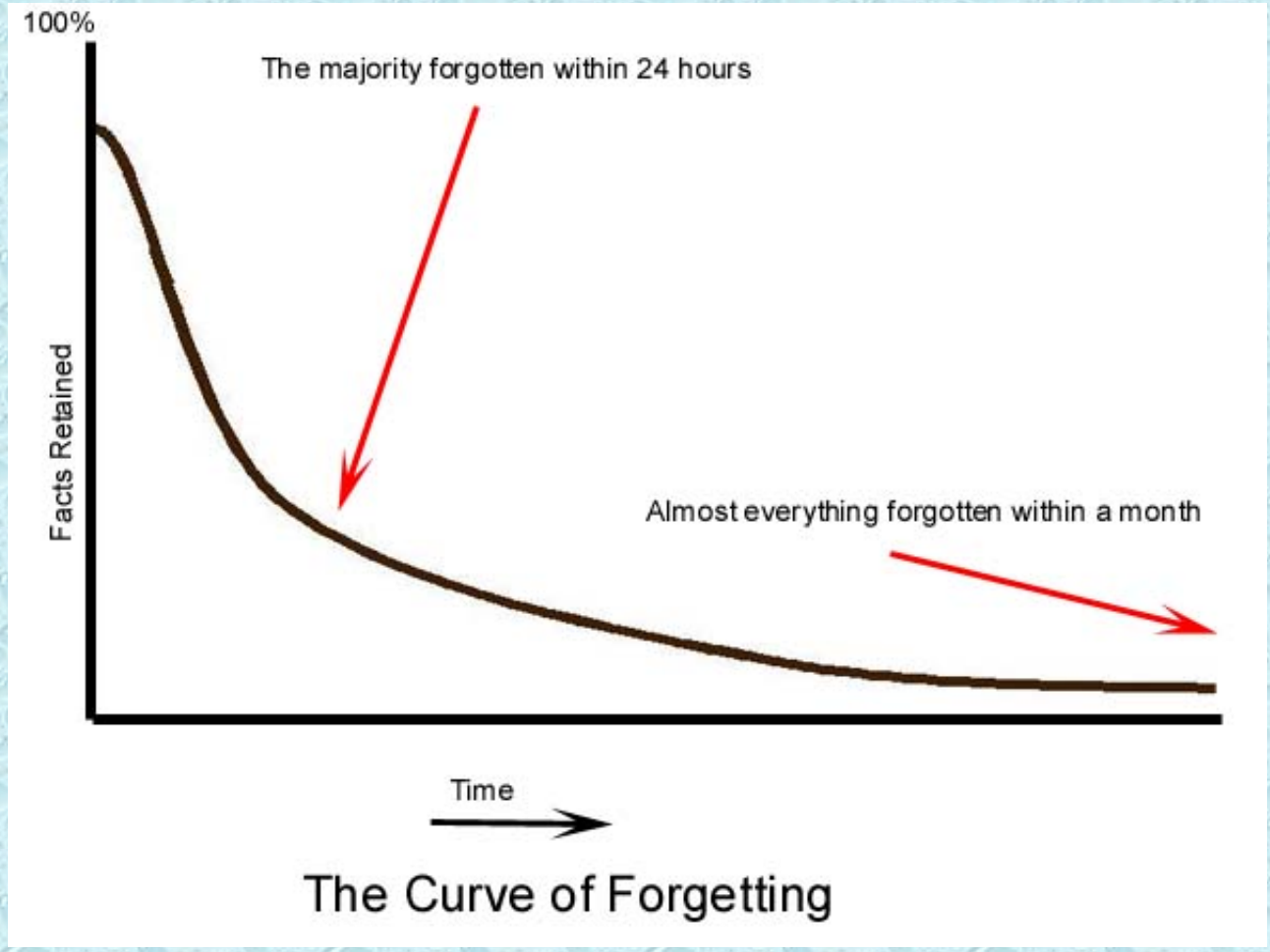

The Curve of Forgetting

We rush.
Time is money.

How much is
remembered
one week later?
one month?
one year?

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Here is a wonderful (old-ish) book that deals with memory and learning:

A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning,
Peter Skehan

Winner of the 'most influential and interesting book on Applied Linguistics that Paul Emmerson has ever read' award.

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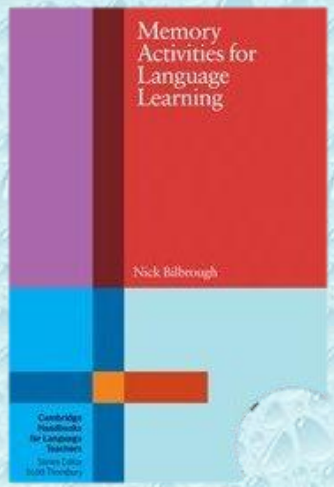
Here is a new book on the same theme:



Memory Activities for Language Learning,
Nick Bilbrough

The back cover asks: is memory is a **fifth skill** along with speaking, listening, reading and writing?

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Bilbrough asks:

What makes material memorable?

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And answers:

- **Simplicity** (accessible level)
- **Unexpectedness** (curiosity, interest)
- **Concreteness** (including pictures and images)
- **Credibility** (the word ‘relevance’ seems closer to his meaning)
- **Emotions** (powerful link between emotions and memory)
- **Stories** (strong narrative element aids memory)

To which I would add:

- **Personalization**

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Sausages!

That was an example of:

- **Unexpectedness**

I bet you'll remember it.

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That was an example of:

- **Unexpectedness**

I bet you'll remember it.

When was the last time you did some targeted, language-aware unexpectedness in class?

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Second slippery fish: sub-technical vocabulary

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Sub-technical vocabulary

So, *not* topic vocabulary:

- words on an Income Statement (Finance)
- collocations with ‘market’ (Marketing)
- *lay off* vs *fire; client vs customer* (Management)

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Sub-technical vocabulary

So, *not* topic vocabulary:

- words on an Income Statement (Finance)
- collocations with 'market' (Marketing)
- *lay off* vs *fire; client vs customer* (Management)

And *not* functional expressions:

- phrases for agreeing and disagreeing (Meetings)
- phrases for highlighting information (Presentations)
- phrases for checking and clarifying information (Telephoning)

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Sub-technical vocabulary

But instead:
Words, collocations and expressions that are in common use right across business and do not fit into any neat coursebook section.

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Examples from my real language feedback notes …

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Examples from my real language feedback notes (last week) …

possibilities -> alternatives, options

a sponsor that we may get -> a potential sponsor

we both have the same target -> aim/goal/objective

to get money in a short time -> in the short term

can you insure me it won't happen again? -> assure

we realize the point-of-sale marketing -> produce/organize

you never make a punctual point at the end of the year -> an exact figure

a middle-ranged company -> middle-sized

my intention is that the price of steel will rise -> expectation/prediction

we use some questions in the research -> a questionnaire in the survey

we could find clients in other branches -> industries/sectors

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The backbone of my language feedback.
Probably yours too.

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The backbone of my language feedback.
Probably yours too.

Any ideas on how to get a grip on this kind of language from a materials point of view?

It doesn't group itself into categories or lexical sets.

Maybe it will always just be left to the feedback slot.

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Probably yours too.

Any ideas on how to get a grip on this kind of language from a materials point of view?
It doesn't group itself into categories or lexical sets.
Maybe it will always just be left to the feedback slot.

I think the quality of our teaching is a lot to do with how we choose and deal with this language.

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To finish, a shipwreck …

Pronunciation

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Pronunciation is an endangered species in (most) coursebooks.

Why?

For a good reason actually. Pronunciation problems tend to be quite L1-specific, and so including valuable space in the book is a risky option: only some nationalities will find any one exercise useful.

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That means

It’s up to us.

(and to teacher training).

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I’m talking about …

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- Individual phonemes, according to nationality. That includes the up-close mechanics of mouth/tongue/teeth.
- Drilling of key words that arise in discussion, where the word stress presents problems for your students. (a-na-ly-sis, suc-cess, pur-cha-sing)
- Drilling of some topic lexis (eg collocations) from a reading or listening text in your book, if possible included in a short sentence for context.
- Drilling of functional expressions. You will have to complete sentence heads such as '*What exactly do you mean by …*' to make whole sentences.
- Drilling of a target grammar form, contextualized in a short sentence.
- Drilling of 50% of boardwork just before you wipe it clean, as a final reminder.
- Students reading short paragraphs (particularly parts of a presentation) aloud and to themselves (eg all spread round room facing the walls) to experiment with stress and pausing for dramatic effect.

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I introduce the area of pronunciation carefully …

"We've done a lot of good speaking today, and some vocabulary work as well. But so far we haven't done much on pronunciation.
Pronunciation is very important if you want other people to understand you, and also for emphasizing important words and important points.
This classroom is a safe place where you can try making the sounds and rhythms of English. This is your chance to practise.
Shall we do some work on pronunciation now?"

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Then it's lots and lots of:

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And please …

No reading aloud of a long text paragraph by paragraph, student by student, round the group. This is not pronunciation practice.
It is a pointless waste of time.
No-one learns anything.
Many get embarrassed.

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Those are my thoughts today.
They might not have been my thoughts yesterday.
They probably won't be my thoughts tomorrow.

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Things ebb and flow.

Those are my thoughts today.
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They probably won't be my thoughts tomorrow.

Things ebb and flow.

That's what happens with tides.

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Goodbye and …

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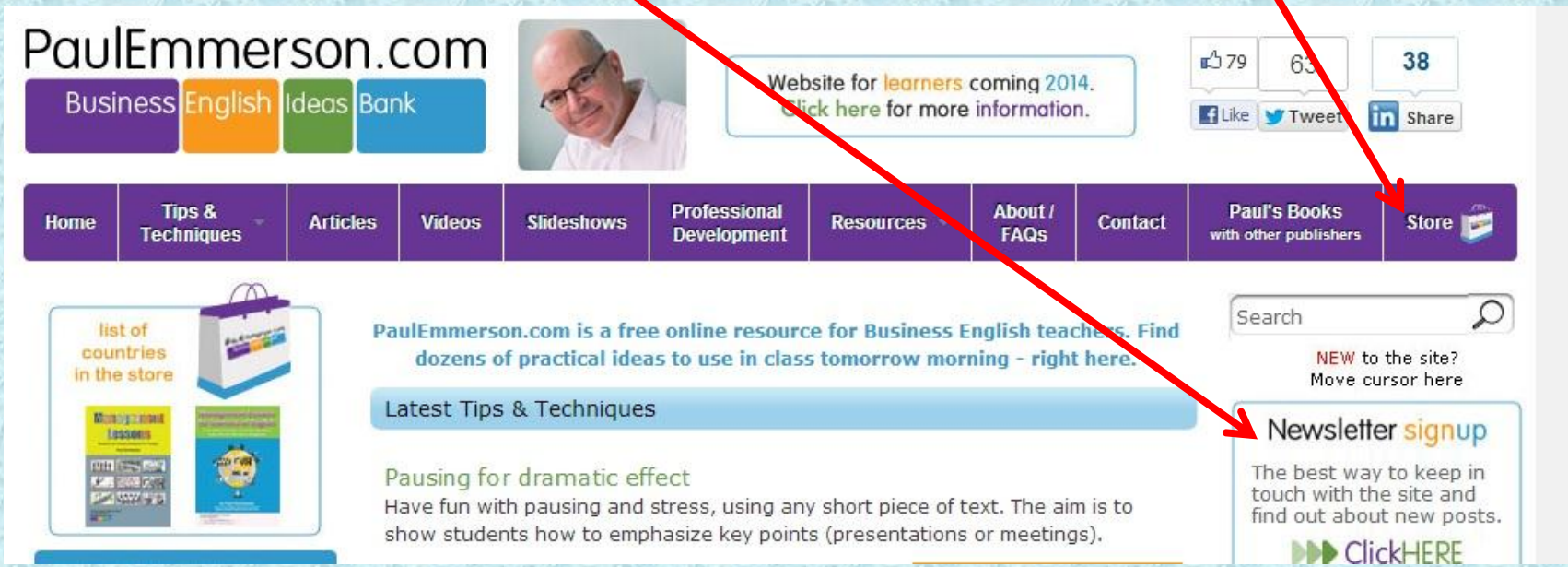
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