

Didattica della lingua inglese 1

Lesson 1
Introduction
Child Language Acquisition
Starting and ending your lessons in English

Introduction

- Welcome to the course!
- There will be 10 lessons, each of 3 hours
 - Thursdays, 14.00-17.00
 - Ricevimento Thursday 11.00-13.00 or after the laboratorio on Wednesdays
- Please note that there will NOT be lessons on:
 - Thursday 8th March = next week (exam week)
 - Thursday 5th April (Easter break)

Introduction

- About your teacher...

- My name is Gill Philip
- I am Scottish



- For many years I taught English at the University of Bologna's language centre (CILTA)
 - I have 15 years of experience as a classroom teacher, with learners of all abilities (beginner – advanced)
 - I have co-written several self-access English courses, and a text-book
 - I have extensive experience in test-writing and language assessment

Introduction

- About this course
 - I intend to teach you how to teach English
 - We will use a text-book as a base
 - **English for Primary Teachers: A handbook of activities & classroom language** by Mary Slattery & Jane Willis
 - We will also use a range of published materials
 - Check my *pagina docente* for materials to download and bring to class
 - We will use English as much as possible both in teaching and in carrying out the classroom tasks

About the course

- How the course is structured
 - We have one lesson each week
 - The lessons will not be all “chalk and talk”...
 - You will have to participate actively
 - You will often work in small groups
 - You may also sing, dance, and make fools of yourselves
 - There is also a practical workshop (*laboratorio*)
 - It will start in March, after the exam week
 - There will be 5 lessons of 2 hours duration

About the course

- What you will need
 - A copy of the course book
 - Slattery & Willis **English for Primary Teachers / Inglese per gli insegnanti della scuola primaria**
 - It doesn't matter if you get the English or the Italian version
 - Access to a computer with an internet connection
 - You will need to download extra materials
 - You will have to visit sites for online exercises and resources
 - A way to record yourself speaking
 - Old-fashioned cassette recorder, or
 - A mobile phone with exportable audio, or
 - A computer program (e.g. Audacity), and microphone

About module 1

Theoretical background to language learning

1. Language and communication in L1 and other languages
 - How children learn languages
 - Language learning and cognitive development
2. The 4 skills; how to integrate them in language teaching
 - Reading
 - Listening
 - Speaking (monological and dialogical)
 - Writing
3. Grammar vs. vocabulary
 - What does a language consist of?

About lesson 1

- In today's lesson we are going to...
 - Look at the most influential theories of child language acquisition
 - Jean Piaget (1896-1980)
 - Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)
 - Discuss the “critical period hypothesis”
 - Investigate the differences between learning the mother tongue (L1) and...
 - Learning a second language (L2)
 - Learning a foreign language (FL)
- We are also going to look at
 - How to start and end your lessons in English

Part 1

HOW LANGUAGES ARE LEARNED

Before we start...

- Read the statements on the questionnaire “Popular opinions about language learning and teaching” (Lightbown & Spada 2006)
 - To what extent (=how much) do you agree or disagree with these statements?
 - Write down some of your reactions – we will return to these in lesson 10
 - Discuss your views in groups of 4-6

task

1. Languages are learned mainly through imitation.
2. Parents usually correct young children when they make grammatical errors.
3. Highly intelligent people are good language learners.
4. The most important predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation.
5. The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.
6. Most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language.
7. The best way to learn new vocabulary is through reading.

task

8. It is essential for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.
9. Once learners know roughly 1000 words and the basic structure of a language, they can easily participate in conversations with native speakers.
10. Teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practise examples of each one before going on to another.
11. Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones.
12. Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.

task

13. Teachers should use materials that expose students to only those language structures they have already been taught.
14. When learners are allowed to interact freely (for example, in group or pair activities), they copy each other's mistakes.
15. Students learn what they are taught.
16. Teachers should respond to students' errors by correctly rephrasing what they have said rather than by explicitly pointing out the error.
17. Students can learn both language and academic content (e.g. science and history) simultaneously in classes where the subject matter is taught in their second language.

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Child language acquisition

- We know a lot about how children learn their first language (L1; mother tongue)
 - Researchers have described developmental sequences for many aspects of first language acquisition
 - Certain “stages” have been identified
 - These stages are connected to children’s cognitive development

Child language acquisition

- An overview
 - At 6 weeks, babies “coo” and “babble”
 - At 12 months, infants can produce single words
 - At 18 months, infants can produce two-word sequences
 - By 5 years of age, children can produce complex constructions.

Piaget



Jean Piaget 1896 – 1980

- The Swiss psychologist and educator **Jean Piaget** is famous for his learning theories based on different stages in the development of children's intelligence.
- How do children learn?

Piaget

- Language development is an aspect of cognitive development in general
- Children learn...
 - by interacting with the world around them
 - when they take action to solve problems
- Children actively construct their own learning through
 - assimilation
 - The child solves the problem by using existing skills or knowledge
 - accommodation
 - The child has to change his/her behaviour in order to solve the problem

Piaget

- For Piaget, there are four stages of mental growth:
 - birth to age two: sensory-motor stage
 - Infants concentrate on concrete (or real) objects
 - age two to seven: pre-operational stage
 - Children learn symbols in language, fantasy, play, and dreams;
 - age seven to eleven: concrete operational stage
 - Children master classification, relationships, numbers, and ways of reasoning (arguing to a conclusion) about them
 - age eleven onwards: formal operational stage
 - Children begin to master independent thought and other people's thinking.

Piaget

- The understanding of children aged 0-11 years is based on actively exploring the environment (surroundings) rather than on language understanding.
- Nature and nurture are related and equally important
- Mental growth takes place through
 - **integration** (learning higher ideas by absorbing lower-level ideas)
 - **substitution** (replacing early explanations of an occurrence or idea with a more reasonable explanation.)
- Children learn in stages in an upward spiral of understanding, with the same problems tackled and solved more completely at each higher level.

Piaget

- Piaget's critics argue that
 - He does not take account of social factors
 - How children interact with other humans
 - They also argue that his "stages" are too fixed
 - Children are able to do many things with help before they have reached the "stage" at which these things are supposed to be possible.

Vygotsky



Lev Vygotsky 1896 – 1934

- Vygotsky was a Soviet developmental psychologist
- Children learn by internalizing the results of interactions with adults
- He is known for the ZPD:

Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky

- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
 - The ZPD refers to the difference between what a child can do alone and what s/he can learn under the guidance of an adult.
 - Interactive learning with adults is most effective in helping children cross this zone.
 - Adults and more advanced peers must help direct and organize a child's learning before the child can master and internalize it.

Vygotsky

- The Zone of Proximal Development uses two levels to measure a child's ability and potential.
 - A child's "actual development level" is when he or she can work unaided on a task or problem.
 - This sets a baseline for the child's knowledge, and is traditionally what is assessed and valued in schools.
 - The "potential development level" is the level of competence a child can reach when he or she is guided and supported by another person.
- The idea of a significant adult guiding a child through the ZPD is known as "scaffolding."
 - "Scaffolding" (impalcatura) means providing structure
 - By providing structure, an adult gradually introduces more difficult tasks.
 - This gradual approach guarantees that the child will be able to develop the ability to complete the final task alone.

Vygotsky

- "Most of the psychological investigations concerned with school learning measured the level of mental development of the child by making him solve certain standardized problems. The problems he was able to solve by himself were supposed to indicate the level of his mental development at the particular time ... We tried a different approach. Having found that the mental age of two children was, let us say eight, we gave each of them harder problems than he could manage on his own and provided slight assistance ... We discovered that one child could, in cooperation, solve problems designed for twelve year olds, while the other could not go beyond problems intended for nine year olds. The discrepancy between a child's mental age [indicated by the static test] and the level he reaches in solving problems with assistance is the zone of his proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1986, p.186-7)

Vygotsky

- Vygotsky's concept of "scaffolding" has been developed by others
- A number of steps that contribute to effective scaffolding have been identified. These are...
 1. Arouse interest
 2. Simplify the task
 3. Scaffold the task itself
 4. Interpret the activity
 5. Solve problems
 6. Teach enthusiasm (Bruner, 1982)
- Developmental psychologists emphasize that adults must construct the scaffolding with the child and help the child through it

Piaget, Vygotsky, and language

- How do Piaget and Vygotsky's work feed into language teaching?
 - First, language is a tool for cognitive growth.
 - New language can be created from what we know
 - Sometimes we have to change our language behaviour to create new linguistic forms
 - Children learn language well when they are supported with routines and modelling (→scaffolding)

The Critical Period Hypothesis

- The Critical Period Hypothesis argues that young children can learn a second language easily, but after puberty it becomes increasingly difficult to learn a language.
- In detail, the CPH argues that the brain is pre-programmed to learn particular things at particular stages in its development.
- After the "critical period" for learning has passed, it becomes difficult or impossible to learn the skill or knowledge.

The Critical Period Hypothesis

- According to Lenneberg (1967), a critical period for acquiring language is set aside by nature between the ages of 2 and 13.
- The idea of a fixed critical period is now disputed.
 - Research has proved that language acquisition begins well before the age of 2 - babies who are only a few days old can recognise words in their own language
 - Language development does not stop at adolescence
 - Vocabulary acquisition increases enormously at this stage
 - Register and style are acquired though adolescence and beyond, as are
 - Complex grammatical structures

The Critical Period Hypothesis

- What IS true is that children go through stages of language learning
 - They learn structures in a fixed sequence
 - The sequence does not change much if the language is being learned as a L2
 - For English, children learn... (from Brown 1973)
 - Plural -s before possessive 's before 3rd person verb -s
 - Copula be before auxiliary be
 - Irregular past, e.g. went before regular past -ed (!)

Child language acquisition

- Read this transcript of a mother talking to her little child of 16 months. Notice how much language she uses and how she talks about what is happening to the child.
 - MOTHER: Now we're nearly dressed... OK now over your head... good boy... put in your other hand... now shoes. Where are your shoes?
 - CHILD: SUS ...
 - MOTHER: Yes. Your shoes. Where are they?
 - (Both look around for the shoes.)
 - MOTHER: Oh there. Look... your shoes ... on the chair.
 - CHILD: SUS. SUS.
 - MOTHER: Yes shoes.
- How many phrases does she say?
- And how many words does the child say?



Learning another language

- What differences do you think there might be between...
 - Learning the first language (L1, mother tongue) and
 - Learning a second language (L2) and
 - Learning a foreign language (FL)

Learning another language

- Consider these profiles...
 - A young child learning a first language (L1)
 - A child learning a second language in pre-school or primary school (L2)
 - A teen learning a foreign language at school (FL)
 - An immigrant adult working in a L2 environment, with no time to go to language classes

Learning another language

- And consider these conditions
 1. Do they already speak a language?
 2. Are they cognitively mature?
 3. Do they have any metalinguistic awareness?
 4. What is their world knowledge like?
 5. Might they feel bad about making mistakes?
 6. Can they be silent while learning the language?
 7. Do they have enough time to learn the language?
 8. Do they get corrective feedback?
 9. Do others modify their speech to aid comprehension?

Child language learners

- **What are children like as learners?**
 - They are developing quickly as individuals
 - They learn in a variety of ways, for example, by watching, by listening, by imitating, by doing things
 - They are not able to understand grammatical rules and explanations about language
 - They try to make sense of situations by making use of non-verbal clues
 - They talk in their L1 about what they understand and do
 - They can generally imitate the sounds they hear quite accurately and copy the way adults speak
 - They are naturally curious, and love to play and use their imagination
 - They are comfortable with routines and enjoy repetition
 - They have quite a short attention span and so need variety.

Child language learners

- **How can you as teacher help them?**
 - Make learning English enjoyable and fun
 - Don't worry about mistakes.
 - Be encouraging.
 - Make sure children feel comfortable, and not afraid to take part.
 - Use a lot of gestures, actions, pictures to demonstrate what you mean.
 - Talk a lot to them in English, especially about things they can see.
 - Play games, sing songs, say rhymes and chants together.
 - Tell simple stories in English, using pictures and acting with different voices.
 - Don't worry when they use their mother tongue.
 - Keep recycling new language but don't be afraid to add new words.
 - Plan lessons with varied activities, some quiet, some noisy, some sitting, some standing and moving.

Child language learners

- **If you are teaching a foreign language to children under 7, remember that**
 - They acquire through hearing and experiencing lots of English, in much the same way as they acquire their first language.
 - They learn through doing things and playing.
 - They love playing with language sounds, imitating and making funny noises.
 - They are not able to organize their learning.
 - They may not be able to read or write in their mother tongue, so it is important to recycle new words and expressions.
 - Their grammar will develop gradually on its own, provided they hear lots of English and learn to understand a lot of words and phrases.

Child language learners

- **If you are teaching a foreign language to children aged 7-12, remember that**
 - They are learning to read and write in their own language
 - They are developing as thinkers and can work meanings out for themselves
 - They understand the difference between the real and the imaginary
 - They can understand simple things about language
 - They can work with others and learn from others
 - They can plan and organize how best to carry out an activity
 - They can cope with a wide range of language input