

A Lively Lesson with a "Dead" Overhead Projector

by Earl D. Wyman

It was one of those days that began with two students talking.

S1: *Does she has a beautiful hair?*

S2: *Yes, he is.*

Then the beautifully-prepared lesson which was totally dependent upon the use of the overhead projector was terminated before its inception by a brilliant (if not so beautiful) flash from the lamp, and punctuated with a puff of noxious smoke.

Adaptation in Teaching

Adapting materials to suit the specific teaching situation is one of the skills considered essential in a truly effective teacher, and it is appropriately emphasized in quality teacher-training programs. Most teachers, however, are left on their own when it comes to the equally-important skill of adapting to unexpected situations. For instance, most teacher-preparation courses include some instruction on the use of the overhead projector and the creation of transparencies. But when have either the uninitiated or the experienced been guided in what to do when the lamp in a projector fails, a cassette recorder chews up the tape, or the take-up reel for a 16mm film is not delivered? For those who have prepared a lesson around equipment, only to face the frustration of having it fail to cooperate, here is a suggestion of what can be done when audio-visual hardware fails.

This technique utilizes the overhead projector as a prop or realia item, and although the procedure can utilize an overhead in a situation in which it is inoperative, any piece of audio-visual equipment (whether working or not) can be substituted. The procedure that is suggested here is a communicative drill which can be used to introduce, practice, review, or test grammatical concepts, listening comprehension, appropriate responses, and question-formation

skills. The level of the students will determine how long and at what pace the drill can be used.

Getting Started: The Initial Statement

With the projector sitting anywhere in the room, the teacher begins by stating to the class:

I want to use the overhead. What do I have to do?

Depending on the students' inclinations and abilities, answers such as the following might be given:

We have to move the projector.
We have to plug in the projector.
We have to put up the screen.
We have to turn off the lights.

Although you may wait until you have listed all the necessary actions involved in using the overhead, it is probably more effective to intersperse the development of the above list with appropriate "inversion/yes-no" questions such as:

Do we have to move the projector?
Do we have to plug it in?
Do we have to put up the screen?
Do we have to turn off the lights?

Numerous teaching points may be emphasized through the use of this procedure. Which ones receive attention, and how much time is taken on any one, will be determined by the level of the students, previous instruction, teaching objectives, and personal preferences. Only some of the possibilities are suggested here.

1. New vocabulary such as *overhead projector* and the phrase *to have to* (which occur in the opening statement) as well as dialect differences (*plug in/outlet*) and variants (*turn off/turn out*)
2. The location of the auxiliary verb in

English questions and its importance in determining the tense of the action

3. The necessity of responding with the same auxiliary that is used in the question, and confusion that is created in the mind of the questioner when an inappropriate change is made, for example,

*Do we have to move the projector?
Yes, we can.*

4. The unstressed quality of the auxiliary verb in most English sentences and the resulting difficulty in hearing this essential cue
5. The separable or non-separable nature of phrasal verbs
6. The consistent use of the infinitive following *have to*
7. The principle of appropriateness and register in speaking, for example,

*Do we have to plug in the projector?
Yup. Yah. Um-hmm.
Yes.
Yes, we do.
Yes, we have to plug in the projector.*

Note: Since the purpose of this exercise is to train students to listen for and use the appropriate verb tense, the third form which requires the use of the auxiliary should be required as the response.

8. Potentially all English verb tenses, contracted forms, reflexive pronouns, etc.

The Second Statement

To this point the students have identified what has to be done to use the projector, and now we move on to another question:

What should we do first?

Again there will be a variety of answers from which you must select the acceptable response(s). Then continue. The next several questions involve the repeated use of the inversion question requiring a *yes/no* response in the correct register and tense. New verb tenses can be introduced into the drill at any time as can tag or intonation questions.

The drill follows the general pattern of the teacher asking a question followed by a student answering, and it is assumed that the teacher will randomly select the student who will respond. The students should not be able to predict who will be called upon to answer until the question has been spoken and an appropriate pause has allowed all students to prepare the correct response. In the hypothetical dialog below, 'S' simply

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refers to that student which the teacher has selected to give the answer.

Dialog:

- T: *Should we turn off the lights next?*
S: *No, we shouldn't.*
T: *What should we do?*
S: *We should close the curtains.*
T: *Do you know how to close them?*
S: *Yes, I do.*
T: *Does he know how to close the curtains?*
S: *Yes, he does.*
T: *Go ahead . . . Wait . . . What are you going to do?*
S: *I'm going to close the curtains.*
T: *What is he going to do?*
S: *He's going to close the curtains.*
T: *Has he closed them yet?*
S: *No, he hasn't.*
T: *Go ahead . . . Wait . . . What are you doing?*
S: *I'm closing the curtains.*
T: *What's he doing?*
S: *He's closing the curtains.*
T: *Has he finished?*
S: *No, he hasn't.*
T: *Go ahead . . . What did you do?*
S: *I closed the curtains.*
T: *Has he closed the curtains?*
S: *Yes, he has.*
T: *What was he doing?*
S: *He was closing the curtains.*
T: *What should we do next?*
S: *We should plug in the projector.*

- T: *Does she know how to plug it in?*
 S: *Yes, she does.*
 T: *Will you plug it in?*
 S: *Yes, I will.*
 T: *Will she plug in the projector?*
 S: *Yes, she will.*
 T: *Does she know how to do it?*
 S: *Yes, she does.*
 T: *Go ahead . . . Plug it in . . . Wait. What are you going to do?*
 S: *I'm going to plug in the projector.*
 T: *Can you do it alone?*
 S: *Yes, I can.*
 T: *Can she plug it in by herself?*
 S: *Yes, she can.*

This manner of questioning and answering can be followed for surprisingly long periods of time for a variety of reasons:

1. The language is meaningful and contextualized—it is the very language that is necessary and appropriate to perform the kind of tasks in which the students are regularly involved.
2. The principles of Total Physical Response are applied. The students are required to be physically performing the task about which they are talking.
3. The students become involved in a problem-solving activity—determining what must be done and in what sequence, as well as who will perform the actions, and then doing them.
4. The teacher can spend as little or as much time as is necessary on introducing, practicing, reviewing, or testing any particular teaching point and with any particular student.
5. Students associate the activity with reality and enjoy the opportunity to practice

identifying the correct auxiliary verb to be used in a situation which is simple and realistic as well as non-threatening and entertaining.

In this particular drill the emphasis is on the auxiliary verb which has a central position in the formation of essentially all English declarative and interrogative sentences. By introducing and drilling the auxiliary verb in this way, no attempt is made to restrict students to the use and practices of one verb tense isolated from others. Normal speaking situations require the ability to identify and use a variety of verb tenses within the same utterance. Furthermore, the identification and use of the correct auxiliary verb affects the accuracy and the appropriateness of responses to almost all questions in English. It is the purpose of the drill to develop in the students an ability to hear and to use the auxiliary verb used in the question. There may be times when the student will use vocabulary or tenses without yet fully understanding the meaning. No apology is extended for this. The strength of the procedure lies in the reality of the situation which provides an environment in which the meaning is very quickly learned and retained.

Conclusion

So what do you do when your equipment fails? Use it as a prop to teach your students how to identify auxiliary verbs and to respond appropriately and correctly to English questions. By combining imagination and flexibility, an effective teacher can create a lively lesson using a "dead" projector.