

DIALOGUES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by Emilio G Cortez

One of the oldest and most widely used language-teaching aids is the dialogue. Many language teachers consider the dialogue a highly effective teaching vehicle. Nelson Brooks contends:

All that is learned is meaningful, and what is learned in one part of the dialogue often makes meaning clear in another.¹

Faye Bumpass speaks favorably of the dialogue and its use on the elementary level.

Learning language patterns in a dialogue form is a very rewarding experience for children on the elementary levels of foreign language learning. It involves a natural and exclusive use of aural-oral skills, and all the elements of the sound system appear repeatedly.²

Preparing meaningful and appropriate dialogues is a difficult task and of growing concern to textbook writers and language teachers alike.

Julia Dobson and William R. Slager enumerate several considerations which can serve as a guide for writing and/or evaluating pedagogic dialogues.

1. Dialogues should not be excessively lengthy. Ideally, a dialogue consists of two or three exchanges.
2. The dialogue should have an appropriate final line that signals a realistic stopping point in the conversation.
3. The language should be natural and accurately reflect the speech habits of native English speakers.
4. The dialogue should be appropriate for a particular proficiency level (elementary, intermediate, or advanced). Ex-

cessively difficult sounds or structures should be avoided.

5. Ideally, a dialogue has enough content, in terms of either grammar or subject matter, to permit it to tie in closely with the other material in the lesson.
6. The content of the dialogue should reflect the level of sophistication of the student and his knowledge of the world.
7. The tone of the dialogue should be realistic; e.g. adults should speak as adults and children should speak as children.
8. If characters are used, they should be readily identifiable, and their characteristics should be easy to remember. An example of such a character might be a "contrary" child, Pablo, who doesn't do this or doesn't do that; he would be the character for any negative construction.

In keeping with these suggestions, nine dialogues are here presented. Various English words may be substituted into these dialogues without hampering either unity or coherence.

DIALOGUES

Vocabulary Words

- | | |
|---|---------|
| A. Be sure you finish eating your <i>dinner</i> . | Beans |
| B. I can't ; I'm full. | Soup |
| A. I guess you're too full for dessert. | Spinach |
| B. I just got hungry again. | Peas |
| | Carrots |
| A. Where are you going? | Eggs |
| B. To the store; I have to | Butter |

- buy some *bread*.
 A. Can I come?
 B. Sure, let's go.

- A. That's a nice *dog*! Whose is it?
 B. It's Pablo's.
 A. Where'd he get it?
 B. I don't know. Let's ask him.

- A. Did you see *Papo*?
 B. No, I didn't. Why?
 A. He has my *lunch*.
 B. Oh! Here he comes now.

- A. What happened, Paul? You're hurt.
 B. I fell and hurt my *arm*.
 B. I'm going home.
 A. I'll go with you.

- A. Hi! How are you?
 B. Fine, thanks--and you?
 A. Just fine. Where are you going?
 B. To the *library*.
 A. OK. I'll see you later.
 B. So long.

- A. Excuse me. I found this *pencil* on the floor. Is it yours?
 B. Yes, it is. Thank you.

- A. Who's that?
 B. That's my *friend*.
 A. He looks like you.
 B. That's what everybody says.

- A. Wasn't the circus great?
 B. It sure was.
 A. What did you like best?
 B. I liked the *clowns* best.

Milk
 Sugar

Basketball
 Football
 Cat
 Wagon
 Bicycle

Book
 Nickel
 Pen
 Dime
 Quarter

Knee
 Leg
 Back
 Neck
 Nose
 Ankle
 Head

Circus
 Movies
 Store
 Park
 Drugstore

Ruler
 Paper
 Eraser
 Notebook

Cousin
 Brother
 Father
 Uncle

Tigers
 Elephants
 Seals
 Monkeys
 Bears
 Horses
 Lions

Creating appropriate dialogues is an interesting and challenging endeavor--well worth the time and effort. An appropriate dialogue, when meaningfully implemented, constitutes an effective and highly versatile pedagogic aid.

FOOTNOTES

¹Nelson Brooks, *Language and Language Learning* (New York, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1960), p. 145.

²Faye Bumpass, *Teaching Young Students English as a Foreign Language* (New York City: American Book Company, 1963), p. 68.

³Adapted from two sources: Julia Dobson, "Dialogues: Why, When, and How to Teach Them," *English Teaching Forum*, X (May-June, 1972), No. 3, pp. 22-23 and William R. Slager, "Creating Contexts for Language Practice," *TESOL Quarterly*, VII (March, 1973), No. 1, pp. 38-40.

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