

TEACHER'S SPEECH: GIVING INSTRUCTION TO LEARNERS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract

As teachers, most of us have had experiences of giving instructions that were misunderstood or incomprehensible to our learners. While occasional foibles in giving instructions are understandable, mastering instruction-giving is a fundamental aspect of good classroom teaching practice. Instructions and their delivery can be the determining factors as to whether a lesson succeeds or fails. This article will investigate the importance and rationale for giving clear instructions in the second-language classroom and provide techniques for giving effective instructions.

Key words: instruction tips, intonation, stress, posture, gestures, facial expressions, transitions.

Regardless of how much effort teachers make, students do not understand their ambiguous instructions and thereby failing to do the activity at hand. Teachers really need update in how to effectively give instructions; otherwise, the teaching process will be doomed to failure.

It seems such an obvious concept and such an easy thing to do, but then, you set up a task, or ask for an action, and it does not come up as imagined. Sometimes, students just understand or get partial information on what they are supposed to do and so, undesired behaviour comes to play.

Instructions are not something to be overlooked, in fact, giving the right sort of instruction is crucial to a good flow of a lesson and performance of an activity.

Failing to do so can result in a huge waste of time, not to mention a series of interruptions with the very same questions or, what I call 'interrogation mark faces'.

There are some tips for the success of instructions delivery:

- Try and be short, simple and precise;
- Attract students attention first;
- Give all the instructions prior to the beginning of activities;



- Make use of body language, written commands, etc... Do not only count in spoken language;
- If possible, demonstrate the task;
- Be consistent about the way you give instructions so on the long run it will make students' lives easier;
- Don't through your instructions – groups them in order to build a repertoire of instructions and how they worked. In the future, you will only improve what you have already done before without so much trouble.

All in all, being clear is the best way to reduce the possibilities of interruptions and misunderstandings. Producing well delivered instructions teachers will help all sorts of students – from attentive to more dispersive ones.

Intonation refers to the pitch that is used to speak. English has a particularly wide pitch range that allows speakers to vary their pitch by making it rise or fall when expressing an utterance (e.g. sentence or question). Stress refers to an increased loudness for a syllable in a word or for a word in a phrase, sentence, or question.

Intonation and stress are important because they assist in communicating additional meaning to an utterance. It helps to strengthen a specific meaning, attitude, or emotion in an utterance. A speaker can use intonation and stress to inform the audience that a particular part of what the speaker is saying is important or worth attending to.

Regarding intonation, a speaker can raise or drop the pitch in order to express different meanings. For example, the question “why you are laughing?” can be said in two different ways to express two different meanings. The speaker can use a falling pitch at the end of the question on the word “laughing” to express a genuine question. Alternatively, the speaker can use a rising tone on the word “laughing” to express surprise or disagreement.

Regarding stress, a speaker can say a syllable of a word or a word in an utterance louder than other parts of the utterance to emphasize its importance to the audience. Even when the learning has been turned over to the students, it's still tempting to spend too much time giving directions, repeating important information, and telling students how they did instead of asking them to reflect on their work.

Here are main 6 ways teachers can talk less and get students talking more:

- **Don't steal the struggle.** It can be uncomfortable to watch kids struggle to figure out an answer, but they need time and silence to work through it. Resist the



urge to talk students through every step of a problem and instead just observe. Similarly, learn to love think time. I often worry about keeping the momentum of a lesson going, and it's uncomfortable for me to allow several moments of silent "wait time" or "think time" before calling on students. However, I try to push against the feeling that I will lose students' attention because I know providing wait time can actually increase the length and quality of their responses. Letting kids think instead of rushing in to narrate or question builds anticipation around what's going to be said next and increases participation as more kids are prepared to move into the conversation.

- **Move from the front of the classroom.** It's easy to get in an instructional rut when you stand at the same place near the board all day long. Try occasionally sitting on the side of the classroom or in an absent student's desk and say, "I need someone to go up and demonstrate ___ for us." Because students are used to the person at the board facilitating the lesson, they are likely to talk for much longer than if you stay at the front and they're in their seats answering you. You can even remain sitting among the class once the student is done demonstrating and ask follow up questions from other students instead of commenting on the students' demo yourself ("What do all think? Is that an effective method—how do you know? Does anyone use a different strategy?")
- **Teach students signals for your often-repeated phrases and for transitions.** Cut down on conversations about bathroom/water/pencil sharpening/etc by teaching kids to use sign language to request permission: use sign language to indicate your answer back: yes, no, or wait. I also like to teach kids sign language for please, thank you, and you're welcome so that I can reinforce their good choices and acknowledge kids without constantly talking. Use music, a chime, or other auditory signal to indicate when it's time to start an activity, pause, and clean up. The idea here is to give kids a break from hearing your voice: they are far more likely to tune in to a unique sound than to a 20 word direction.
- **Use non-verbal reinforcement for behavior whenever possible.** A lot of the talking most of us do throughout the day is related to student behavior, and most of the time, we're wasting our breath. Resist the urge to lecture students every time someone forgets their materials, interrupts your lesson, or makes an inappropriate noise. It's far more effective (not to mention easier and less disruptive) to give students "the teacher look" and keep the lesson moving. If you need to have a



conversation about the behavior with a student or issue a consequence, try to wait for a break in your instruction rather than stop the whole class from learning while you discipline one kid.

➤ **Turn your statements into questions and prompts.** Instead of saying to a group, “Nice work over here, I like the strategy you used for ___”, ask the kids to reflect on their own work: “Tell me how your group has chosen to solve ___.” Instead of telling a child, “Take a look at #3, that answer is incorrect” say, “Would you tell me how you got the answer for #3?” Not only will these questions get kids talking instead of you, kids will also have the chance to reflect on and articulate their learning.

➤ **Stop repeating yourself.** It’s tempting to say important points and instructions a couple of different ways to make sure every child understands, but that strategy can backfire when it’s overused. Kids learn that it’s okay to tune you out because you’ll repeat everything you say. Instead, experiment with different strategies for getting kids to follow directions the first time you give them and use call-and-response routines to get kids’ attention right away.

Giving clear instructions to students can ensure that they fully comprehend what they need to do to achieve in your classroom. It will ease students' nerves, assuage their insecurities, and help them confirm your expectations so that they can be happy and successful in course.

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