

A Technique for Practising Conditional Sentences

Galina Kavaliauskiene
ukk@ltu.lt

Law University of Lithuania (Vilnius, Lithuania)

This technique aims at teaching learners to personalize target structures and produce short narrations or sentences which are meaningful to them.

Introduction

Teachers are aware that learners have to be motivated and involved in order to be successful. A very effective way of increasing learners' motivation and involvement is by making the learning personally meaningful. This can be achieved by integrating individual learner's personal attitudes, opinions, experiences, likes and dislikes into the process of activating target language, or in other words, integrating personalization into the learning process.

I have used personalization to practise the usage of conditional Sentences. Activities can be carried out in different variations.

In pairs or small groups, learners are asked to generate questions, short narrations or dialogues. If learners are reluctant to produce information referring to themselves, they are welcome to volunteer information on somebody they know well enough to be interested in creating a story about, e.g., a friend, a neighbor, a classmate, etc.

In order to maximize classroom opportunities for interaction, the activities can be transformed into 'question-answer' dialogues between pairs or small groups. Such activities are successful only if all learners are interested and involved. So, a question 'What would you do if you met a famous basketball player?' will only be of interest to basketball fans. Once in a while such an activity might be successful, but next time you want learners to exercise conditional sentences you had better choose a coherent activity, e.g. theme-based activity.

Any topical issues can be included into these activities provided that learners are really involved. Here are possible areas for practicing conditionals:

- leisure,
- jobs,
- habits,
- hobbies,
- skills,
- friends,
- news,
- terrorism,
- sports, etc.

It is always advisable to negotiate the topic with learners, so let them choose which one they prefer to do. Give learners a demonstration before they start creating their own dialogues or short stories. All types of conditionals can be practiced at the same time. It is essential, however, that learners know the difference in meaning and usage of various types of conditionals.

Short Narrations

In my experience, short narrations proved more beneficial to learners than separate sentences. You will be surprised with the masterpieces that your learners are likely to produce.

Here are two examples. The first one concerns a student's hobby.

'If I hadn't met my friends last week, we wouldn't have gone to a casino. If we hadn't gone to a casino, I wouldn't have won a lot of money. If I hadn't won a lot of money, I wouldn't have had so much to drink. If I hadn't had so much to drink, I wouldn't have started a fight. If I hadn't started a fight, I wouldn't have been taken to the police station. If I hadn't been arrested by the police, I wouldn't have been late for work the next day. If I hadn't been late for work, I wouldn't have lost my job. If I hadn't lost my job, I would have been able to gamble from time to time. If I had been able to gamble, I might have won some money.'

The second narration is about learner's speculations about life experience.

'If I buy a lottery ticket, I might win a jackpot. If I win a jackpot, I would buy a big car. If I buy a big car, I would drive to the seaside. If I drive to the seaside, I may might make a lot of friends. If I had a lot of friends, I would probably spend all my money on drinks and girls. If I spend all my money, I would lose all my new friends. If I lose all my friends, I would be miserable and lonely. That is why I never buy lottery tickets.'

A Whole Class Activity

There is another variation of the whole class activity. Divide the class into two equal groups. Ask the first group to write only 'if clauses', and the second group--only 'major clauses'. Allocate a student-assessor in each group who will give points for accuracy, appropriateness and promptness. In the activity, each group takes turns by reading their half of a sentence, and the other group does their best to match it from their bank of clauses. The assessors give independent 'verdicts' on the performance of each group. At the end of the activity 'prizes' are awarded. The teacher's input is minimal and often unnecessary.

The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. VIII, No. 3, March 2002
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