

## LESSON 3 COMMENTARY:

### *Group work or teacher led?*

Like Lesson 2 (*North Pole South Pole*) this is a lesson with general academic content. Here the subject is language description or applied linguistics. For most of this lesson you can usefully see yourself in the role of a TEFL/TESL teacher trainer and focus entirely on the content. The tasks that have been set are exactly the kind of exercises that a teacher trainer might set for a group of trainees, so your overriding aim is to ensure that the concepts have been understood.

In the lesson plan the focus on the first language is left until Task 3. You might want to vary this by using first language examples to introduce the topic and asking learners to think about vague language in their own mother tongue right from the start. If you choose to do this you could then ask them to classify examples of vague language in their first language as Task 3.

A teacher in any class may choose to operate in a teacher led mode. This involves maintaining control over a class and transmitting information through a mixture of teacher explanation and exemplification on the one hand, and a question and answer dialogue with the class on the other. Or the teacher may choose to allow learners to work independently in pairs or groups. You have exactly the same choice.

If you choose a teacher led mode you can still ask learners to work in groups towards the end of the lesson to summarise what they have learnt. This gives you the opportunity to incorporate the *task (discussion) → preparation → report cycle* as described in sections 3, 4 and 5 of Lesson 2 *North Pole South Pole*, giving learners the opportunity to work towards their own language improvement. You can ask learners to summarise in groups what they have learnt about vague language then go on to preparation and report. Alternatively you can set a number of summarising tasks, asking some groups to explain the importance of vague language, other groups to talk about examples and classification of vague language as it occurs in English, and other groups to exemplify and classify vague language as it occurs in the mother tongue. This last task is clearly easier with a monolingual class but it can be adapted for a multilingual class. You can ask if the same vague language phenomenon occurs in all the languages represented in their group.

If you choose to work mainly in groups or pairs you may go through the *task → preparation → report* sequence after each of the three tasks listed in the lesson plan. But if this is in danger of becoming tedious you can summarise one or two of the task through a teacher led question and answer session. If you do this, however, it is still a good idea to give learners preparation time. After they have worked on the task in groups tell them '*Ok. I want to hear what you have to say. In a few minutes we are going to go over the question you have been discussing. Now spend a few minutes preparing your answers.*'

One question which may have occurred to you is how do I decide between a teacher led mode and group or pair work?

The advantages of a teacher approach are:

- Some classes simply feel more comfortable with it. It sometimes takes time for a class to get used to group and pair work, so you may want to lead up to it gradually by giving them the security of a mainly teacher led lesson, with elements of group and pair work.
- A teacher led approach gives learners more opportunity to hear teacher talk and to absorb a model of standard English.
- The teacher led approach gives you tighter control over the content of the lesson. You can usually tell if the class is unhappy with their understanding of content, and you can use questions and answers to check this.

The advantages of group and pair work are:

- Learners have more opportunity to use language for themselves. There will be much more pupil talk in the lesson.
- This means that learners have more opportunities for language improvement. They have more chances to develop their language in the light of new input.
- A group discussion might raise important issues and problems about content which the teacher is not aware of. By listening carefully to group discussion the teacher may learn a lot about how much learners have understood and what problems they are having.

As we have pointed out above you can switch between group and pair work in a single lesson. You need to observe carefully how your learners work in different modes to help you make the right decisions. You can, of course, also consult the learners themselves.